DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 305 EA 019 976

TITLE	Mastering the Basics of Effective School Board Service.
INSTITUTION	Pennsylvania School Boards Association, New Cumberland.
REPORT NO	PSBA-11-87-8M
PUB DATE	[87]
NOTE	170p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 774 Limekiln Road, New Cumberland, PA 17070 ($10.00 prepaid with order; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Advisory Committees; *Board of Education Policy; *Board of Education Role; *Boards of Education; Budgeting; Collective Bargaining; Communication Skills; Decision Making; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; Meetings; *Occupational Information; Policy Formation; Public Schools; School Community Relationship; School Districts; Superintendents; Teacher Strikes
IDENTIFIERS	*Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A composite guidebook covers the collective wisdom and teachings of local school governance. From goal-setting to policy making to board-superintendent relations, this publication places in one complete resource information available to the new and the veteran school board member. Although specifically directed to Pennsylvania board members, the guidebook contains information applicable for board members in other states. Included in this publication are materials from a variety of Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) publications and self-development articles. The following eight chapters take the individual board member through a variety of basic duties and responsibilities, plus proven tenets of board leadership: (1) welcome aboard; (2) planning, policy making and evaluating; (3) operating effective meetings; (4) making informed decisions; (5) board-superintendent relationships; (6) school boards and collective bargaining; (7) finances and budgets; and (8) communicating with your publics. In addition, a concluding section offers self-development resources for the individual board members in effective public speaking and writing to be understood. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Donald B. Owen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED294305

EA019976

Published by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association

Published by

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association
774 Limekiln Road
New Cumberland, Pennsylvania 17070

Preface

Mastering the Basics of Effective School Board Service is another communication tool available to local school directors and other school officials.

Making effective decisions on behalf of the students and citizens across the commonwealth requires informed, knowledgeable lay citizens. The learning and sharing process among board members is a never-ending one, requiring continuous inservice training and educational development.

Included in this publication are some of the most popular and widely accepted materials from a variety of PSBA publications and self-development articles. This publication becomes a basic primer for the new school director as well as being useful for the veteran board member. Eight well-structured chapters in clear, succinct prose take the individual board member through a variety of basic duties and responsibilities, plus proven tenets of board leadership. In addition, a concluding section offers many self-development resources for the individual board member such as effective speaking and writing.

Today's citizenry have greater expectations for school board members than they do for any other elected officials. These expectations extract from school directors a very heavy price in their time, talents and intellect.

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association presents this useful textbook in our continuing pursuit to provide the best information to the local school director, knowing full well if we can achieve this, school boards will make the best decisions for their students and communities. Through this publication and our many services we join you and your colleagues in this challenging endeavor.

Joseph V. Oravitz
Executive Director

Acknowledgments

Mastering the Basics of Effective School Board Service is a composite guidebook covering the collective wisdom and teachings of local school governance. From goal setting to policy making to board-superintendent relations, this publication places in one complete resource the best information available to the new and the veteran school board member.

Edited, excerpted and revised by PSBA staff, the material in this book allows Pennsylvania school board members to focus on basic ethical and legal standards, as well as proven guidelines in astute boardmanship.

Nick Goble, PSBA assistant executive director, and **Donald B. Owen Esq.,** PSBA inservice education director, served as co-editors, writers and project directors in screening a wide variety of material from PSBA publications and other sources. In addition, other PSBA staff wrote many of the articles which were excerpted from other publications as noted.

Lynn H. Mannion, PSBA publication services director, organized and researched literally hundreds of possible materials for this guidebook. She was responsible for all design and production activities. Typesetting, layout and graphics were completed internally by other PSBA staff: **Robyn Blumling,** editorial supervisor; and **Lisa Hoover** and **Patrice Ruth,** composition specialists.

Other PSBA staff contributions, along with other authors and resources, are identified in each article and chapter. The association is grateful to all organizations and writers for their contributions and assistance in the production of this excellent guidebook for Pennsylvania school officials.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Welcome aboard

School boards in Pennsylvania 1
Public schools belong to the public 5
What is a school board? 7
School board members' basic duties and responsibilities 11
PSBA: Serving public interest in public education 15
Code of Ethics for Pennsylvania school board members 19

Chapter 2: Planning, policy making and evaluating

The board's responsibilities 23
Policy development: A school board's basis for evaluation 27
Policy making: A board member's perspective on management input 33
Policy making: An administrator's perspective on management input 37

Chapter 3: Operating effective meetings

Guidelines to effective parliamentary procedure 43
How school boards operate effective meetings 51
Operating effectively in the sunshine 57
Board meetings: Tips for success 63
Board meetings don't have to be battlegrounds 65

Chapter 4: Making informed decisions

Do board members really know what's going on? 71
Inservice training: Not an 'either-or' question 77
Inservice education: Dollars well spent 79
Board workshops: Effective tool for planning and learning 81
How to recognize an effective board member 85
Here's looking at yourself 87
84 tips for being a better board member 89
Why is planning important? 93

Chapter 5: Board-superintendent relationships

Selecting the right superintendent 99
Learning the ropes of school board leadership 103
The board of education and the superintendent 109
Policy making, the board and the superintendent 113

Chapter 6: School boards and collective bargaining

Five myths and misconceptions about Act 195 119
Conflict in bargaining is not likely to disappear 121
Effective employe relations reduce conflict in the bargaining process 125
Strikes require special attention 129

Chapter 7: Finances and budgets

Financial and business affairs 133
School district budgets: A public relations plus 137
Planning a budget development process 141
Involving the public in budget decisions 145

Chapter 8: Communicating with your publics

School-community relations and effective schools 149
Six steps in building school community relations 153
Make your school inviting 157
Don't bet against polls 161
Helpful guidelines for advisory committees 165
Educational atmosphere-relationship study:
A management-communication inventory 169

Personal resources

How to write so you'll be understood 175
Four steps to success in public speaking 179
Self-help suggestions for public speaking 181

1 School boards in Pennsylvania

5 Public schools belong to the public

7 What is a school board?

11 School board members' basic duties and responsibilities

15 PSBA: Serving public interest in public education

19 Code of Ethics for Pennsylvania school board members

School boards in Pennsylvania: Their history, heritage, horizons

Have you ever wondered how school boards got started — why they are of a certain size — why they are elected — why they can do some things, can't do others — and why discretion is the major part of their authority?

The above title could have read: past, present, future; birth, worth and dearth; conception, perception and projection; hatching, matching and scratching; creation, operation and frustration; or just school boards — their birth pains, labor pains and migraines.

But school boards do have a birthright, a lineage, a heritage all of which you should know about and of which you should be justly proud; a diary recording your deeds and accomplishments and a zodiac sign that attempts to foretell your future. Let's look first at how you came to be.

One of the most interesting facets of the history of education in Pennsylvania is the history of the development of the school boards and the progressive involvement of these boards in the evolving educational attainments of the commonwealth. Prior to 1834, the year of the Free Public School Act, public education was commonly known as pauper education and the public schools were nicknamed "pauper schools." This rather discourteous appellation was the outgrowth of an act of 1802 that provided for "free education of the children of families which had taken the pauper's oath."

First school districts

In 1818 the first school district in Pennsylvania was established in Philadelphia and, in 1821 the second school district, in Lancaster. Acts of 1804 and 1809 authorized the courts to appoint a board of school directors of 12 members.

The Act of 1824 provided for the election of "three school men" from each township to manage the pauper schools. Every governor, beginning in 1800, had pleaded for some type of free public education, but it was Gov. George Wolf in 1834 who made education his number one project.

Six elected directors, three-year term

The Act of 1834, known as the Free Public School Act, made every borough, town and township a school district. The act read:

> It shall be the duty of the Sheriff of each county, thirty days previous to the third Friday of September 1834, to give notice, by proclamation, to the citizens of each school district to hold elections in their respective townships, wards and boroughs . . . to choose six citizens of each school district to serve as school directors of said district . . . The school board at its first meeting will divide itself into three classes of two directors each and to serve one, two and three years. Thereafter, two directors shall be chosen annually to serve for three years.

The duties of these first boards, as detailed in the act, are most interesting: To determine the number of schools to be opened, to cause school houses to be erected, purchase or "hire land for schools, appoint capable teachers at liberal salaries, to admit scholars, to have general superintendence of schools, and to pay the necessary expenses incurred thereby." Sound familiar?

The Free School Act of 1834 established the tradition of local autonomy along with the precedent for free public education.

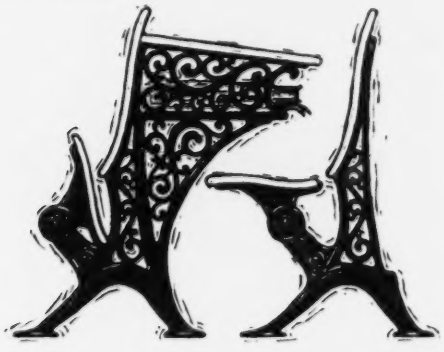
It was also the duty of each school board to assign at least two of its members to visit every school within their school district at least once every month and to record each such visit in the school board minutes.

Several other interesting provisions were: decisions were made not by a majority, but by a four-out-of-six vote; all payments were to be drawn by the treasurer, signed by the president and countersigned by the secretary; and most transactions were made in cash.

School district inspectors

The 1834 act required that each school board make an annual report to the school district inspectors on their visits to the schools, and reveal school receipts, school expenditures, number of days of school, salary of the teacher, his or her general conduct, his or her qualifications and fitness to teach, and any other information the inspectors should "deserve" to know.

Such inspectors, as representatives of local control, were actually the forerunners for the county superintendency. There were two inspectors, court appointed, and in many cases the school board president was an inspector. They received no pay and, to show their reputed importance in the district, they were exempt from compulsory militia duty.



Gov. George Wolf, a long-time advocate of improved education, fulfilled his goal of schools open to all children when he signed into law the Free School Act of 1834.

Inspectors were required by law to visit every school at least once every three months. They actually were the first of their kind in the matter of teacher certification. They set the rules for conducting teacher examinations, actually compiled the examination, and had not only the authority to say who should be certified, but also the power to withdraw a certificate of fitness to teach.

Reorganization begins

Gov. William Bigler signed into law a very comprehensive education act on May 8, 1854. Among other things, it mandated school district establishment, created county superintendents, provided that school boards select their own tax collectors and, for the first time, permitted school boards to borrow money for school construction and land purchases.

Each school district now was authorized to select and bond its own treasurer. And, for the first time in Pennsylvania law, the school district became a body corporate in which the school board could sue and be sued.

The 1854 act kept the powers and duties of school boards practically the same as the 1834 act, except that every three years the school directors were asked to meet in convention to select a county superintendent of schools for a three-year term.

County superintendents assumed most of the duties formerly performed by the local inspectors, plus the task of bringing all school districts into full operation.

Your image at home

A problem facing school boards, now and later, is seeing the whole picture — your image, your task, your objectives, your operations.

The term "school board" ordinarily refers to any board that controls our public schools. Each school board, legally, is a creature of the state and subject to its laws. Under the law, control of the public schools lies in the state, not the nation nor the local community.

You, then, are a state official, one to whom responsibilities and authorities are

Legislation in 1854 established the post of county superintendent to aid local school districts in the supervision of teachers, to certify teachers and to provide a direct link with the state department. The act strengthened the powers of local school boards and eliminated small subdistricts in urban areas, which were falling under a patronage system.

delegated by the state. Your every action is that of carrying out the state's business. You may do what the law permits you to do, you shall do what the law mandates you do, you shall not do what the law forbids.

You have a dual responsibility — one to the state, the other to the local citizens. Your image at home will do more to improve your lot than any other function you perform. A poor image is worse than a migraine headache.

Where you may ask lies the migraine? It is in status quo itself. People often feel that the principle of status quo is one standing still. No one stands still. While the world and all its advancements are whizzing by, education — the school board's responsibility — must move forward as well. To attempt to retain status quo is to soon fall so far behind that you are actually moving backward, retrogressing, decaying.

If school boards do not self-examine and self-evaluate themselves and face up to the current growing problems, if they continue to operate as though these problems do not exist or are of little consequence, if the interdependent position of school boards to our total society is not recognized, if minorities are ignored, if teachers are treated as hired hands, if the public is treated as though education is none of its business, then the migraine becomes fatal and the school board may soon be found obsolete and some other mechanism for local school governance will have to be invented.

Excerpted from ***Pennsylvania School Board Members: Their Duties and Responsibilities,*** *published by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1971 and 1974, and based on a presentation by* ***Dr. Herbert E. Bryan,*** *former assistant commissioner in the state Department of Education, and authority on school administration and boardmanship.*

Some interesting statistics

In 1834 . . . there were 987 boroughs, towns and townships, but only 502 voted to establish school districts under the 1834 act and become eligible to receive state subsidy. . . . During the first year of operation under the Free School Act of 1834, 320,000 children were enrolled in school, a 10-fold increase over the enrollment in the pauper schools. . . . There were 3,012 school directors that first year, about one for every one of the 3,394 school teachers.

In 1854 . . . there were 9,699 operating school buildings with 11,713 teachers for 480,778 pupils. . . . School directors numbered about 7,000, and the state appropriated $190,266. . . . Local taxes raised $982,19[illegible] . . . School boards in 1854 spent $293,45[illegible] for new buildings and about $800,000 for all other expenses, about 50 cents per pupil per year for buildings and $2 per pupil per year for instruction costs for a five-month term.

Public schools belong to the public

The American approach to education, especially public education, has been somewhat unique as contrasted with that of other countries. Although other nations have viewed education as a function of central government, the United States has placed its reliance largely upon public education governed by local school boards.

Technically, the public at large owns and operates the public schools through local and state elected officials. This process, called local lay control of the public schools, is often misunderstood by the general public.

Local lay control of public education means that laypeople, not necessarily professional educators, are charged with the governance and direction of public education. Through locally elected or appointed officials, public education has been made available to the general populace. The historical perspective of local lay governance dates to the birth of the United States.

The idea of locally elected people making decisions and governing their community's educational programs was not totally an American innovation, but it is truly an American ideal. The tradition of "free schools for a free people" had its roots deep in the colonization of New England and was based upon religious freedom. As early as 1647, the Massachusetts Bay Colony required larger towns to create and maintain schools.

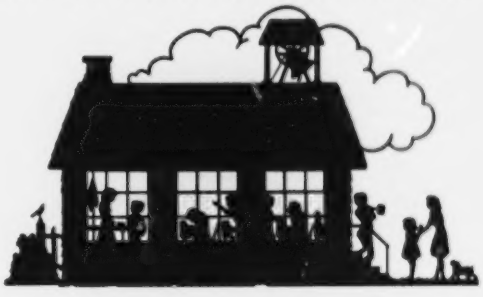
Only in America, through ultimate independence in 1776, did the concept of local school boards arise to be nurtured and ultimately to flourish.

Shortly after the Revolutionary War, the American Philosophical Society, of which Benjamin Franklin was the most illustrious member, decided to sponsor an essay contest to determine the kind of educational system that should be established in the new nation. People of diverse backgrounds entered the contest, with a Philadelphian named Joseph McClure emerging as the winner.

McClure had some strong ideas on how he thought schools should be organized. He was quite a student of the progressive Swiss educator, Johann Pestalozzi. As his prize for winning the essay contest, McClure traveled to Europe and visited Pestalozzi's schools. While there he met Joseph Nice, a Pestalozzi disciple, and invited him to come to America and write a report on the kind of educational system the nation needed. Nice accepted with the provision that he stay for three years, spending the first two in Philadelphia.

After three years of writing, learning and observing, Nice submitted his report to the American Philosophical Society. The report was appropriately titled, *The Establishment of a System of Education for the Descendants of a Free People.*

Nice recommended many things in his report. Unique to his contribution, however, was his recommendation about how the schools should be governed. He said the federal government should be "little more than a coordinating agency for education" with each of the individual states be-



School boards provide local citizen control over education at a point as close to the parent and child as possible.

ing "given primary responsibility for education within its borders."

He further recommended that the states should appoint, or permit to be elected, local school officials to serve as state officers to see that both the educational mandates of the state and the unique desires of each local community be met. Nice also suggested that the state should commission headmasters to be employed by local boards, to ensure that state and local policies are followed.

This, briefly, is how the concepts of free schooling, developed by the colonies prior to the American Revolution, were coupled with the thinking of men like Joseph Nice, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and others. Today's method of public school governance emerged from the constitutions of the original 13 states which established a shared responsibility between local and state control.

Times have changed. Local control of public education has been seriously eroded. America is no longer the sparsely populated land it once was when Thomas Jefferson wrote of a society in which educated men governed themselves.

Today, more than 200 million people with diverse interests and backgrounds live in a complex society, equally dominated by a complex system of government and regulations. **But the basic function of school boards remains the same: To provide local citizen control over education at a point as close to the parent and child as possible.**

This means that the school board should represent the citizens of the school district — not certain individual citizens, but all of them. Because different citizens have varying ideas about schools, this responsibility always presents a challenge.

Yet, the operation of public schools under the control of direct representatives of the people is one of the purest applications of the democratic principles on which our nation was founded. What is truly amazing is that the system about which Joseph Nice wrote some 200 years ago has endured for this period of time.

Local control of the schools has kept American education responsive to the will of the people and close to the people. Local control, a concept born and nurtured in Pennsylvania and the other original states, has served both the nation and education well.

Public Guide to Pennsylvania School Boards, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1979.

Local lay control of public education means that laypeople are charged with the governance and direction of public education. Through locally elected or appointed officials, public education has been made available to the general populace.

What is a school board?

A school board is a legislative body of laypeople called school directors elected locally by their fellow citizens (except in Philadelphia where they are appointed), who serve as agents of the state Legislature. Each board consists of nine members who serve four-year terms of office.

Although elected locally, school directors are really state officials, co-partners with the Legislature, who are designated by school law to administer the school system in each district. School boards have all of the powers necessary to perform this function with the exception of those reserved by the General Assembly to itself.

The definition of school boards, however, and their respective authority, duties and powers, needs further explanation.

Public education is fundamentally a state responsibility. A system of free public education is mandated under the present Pennsylvania Constitution (Article IIB, Section 14), which states: "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education . . .."

Constitutional recognition of the public schools as a legislative function is further found in Article IX, Section 10 in which a school district is described as a "unit of local government." Public education thus enjoys special status under the state constitution and is the only public service so mandated by the constitution.

Consequently, to carry out these mandates, the General Assembly created school districts and school boards. It conferred broad legal powers to the local boards, making the boards autonomous in many of their operations. Therefore, the school board is a political subdivision of the state for the purpose of convenient administration of the schools.

In law and practice, however, the state Legislature is supreme. Technically, all powers delegated by the General Assembly could be withdrawn at any time if it should choose to do so. A board of school directors has no rights or authority except that expressly and specifically given to it by action of the Legislature, or that may be reasonably implied from legislative action.

Therefore, Pennsylvania's system of public education is similar to what is found in most other states.

- Public schools are a creature of the state constitution and are not generally controlled by the United States Constitution.
- Public schools are a responsibility of the General Assembly or the legislative branch of state government.
- School boards, created by the General Assembly, serve as local legislative bodies for the public schools within the framework of state laws.

Qualifications for the office of school director in Pennsylvania are basically very simple. An eligible person must be a Pennsylvania citizen, of good moral character and at least 18 years of age. The candidate must have been a resident of the school district for at least one year prior to the date of election or appointment.

School districts are classified according to total population within their boundaries. Philadelphia is the only first class district, a classification which requires 1.5 million or more residents. Pittsburgh, designated first class (A), falls in the 500,000 to 1.5 million

The local board is designated by law to administer the public schools and it has all the powers necessary to carry out this function, except those powers reserved by the General Assembly.

Public education enjoys special status under the state constitution and is the only public service so mandated by the constitution. The General Assembly conferred broad legal powers to local boards, making them autonomous in many of their operations.

classification. There are 80 second class districts (30,000 or more); 400 third class districts (5,000 to 30,000); and 33 fourth class districts (less than 5,000).

Officers of a school board include a president, a vice president, a treasurer and a secretary. The board may employ a solicitor, establish responsibilities, and fix a salary. This practice is universal, because competent advice on school law is imperative if the board is to operate effectively.

By law, all school boards organize during the first week of December. At this meeting a president and vice president are elected to serve one-year terms of office. A treasurer, however, is elected in May to serve a one-year term that begins the first day of July. Every fourth May the board elects a school board secretary whose term of office is four years.

The school fiscal calendar for all districts is July 1 to June 30 except in Pittsburgh and Scranton, which operate on a calendar year of January 1 to December 31.

In 1970 Pennsylvania completed its planned reorganization when the General Assembly passed Act 102, which divided the state's school districts into 29 intermediate units. Passage of this law eliminated the county superintendents' offices. Every school district is now assigned to one of the intermediate units, with Philadelphia and Pittsburgh as separate intermediate units of themselves.

An intermediate unit has a governing board composed of locally elected school directors from the school districts that make up the intermediate unit. School directors elect representatives to the intermediate board. Each IU board has 13 members who serve three-year terms. Once elected, directors may succeed themselves without limitation as long as they remain local board members.

Intermediate units are by design intended to be service units rather than administrative units. The intermediate board selects an executive director and approves other staff appointments. The IU board also adopts a program of services to be provided to the member districts.

Members of the intermediate unit board meet in convention every April and adopt a budget approved by the participating local school districts.

Officers of the intermediate board are elected annually during July and include a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. The secretary and treasurer may be nonmembers of the IU board. The treasurer may also be any corporation qualified to do business with the state.

What it means to be a school director

There is no greater honor for a person of high purpose than to be selected by the community to help guide the education of their children. It is, however, an honor that must be earned through constant effort and a strong commitment to serving other people. At the heart of this commitment is the fundamental concept of **local lay control of public education**, a concept unique to American public education.

One of the strengths of local control is that membership on school boards tends to be diversified; that is, people have varying backgrounds, ideas and talents. Nearly all of them attended or participated in the public schools, and usually come to their new duties with some fixed idea of what the public schools did to them or for them. In order that the concept of local control can be promoted and preserved, **it is imperative**

that lay board members be adequately informed. PSBA is a primary source of such information.

Serving on a school board is often a thankless and difficult task. The job is unpaid, entails both a great deal of frustration and many hours of a board member's personal time to fulfill this public service.

Board members and school administrators are caught between the escalating demands of teachers' organizations for pay increases and more fringe benefits on the one hand; on the other hand, they are under pressure from their constituents to hold down escalating school costs and still provide quality education. At the same time, school directors must comply with state and federal laws and regulations, court orders and a host of other mandates.

Typically, school directors feel rewarded by the inner satisfaction that comes from ensuring a good education for the children of their communities. School boards do attract some crusaders who have interests other than the educational mission of the public schools, but the vast majority of board members are well aware of their responsibilities, and conscientiously look out for the public interest.

School board service, however, is becoming increasingly complex and demanding. It is little wonder that nationally there has been an increased turnover of school board members. In Pennsylvania, the average number of years of individual school board service has declined especially following the reduction of the term of office from six to four years. Increased demands on personal time, sunshine meeting requirements, financial disclosure laws and harassment by special-interest groups are just a few of the reasons for this turnover.

The most recent PSBA survey shows that over half of the state's school directors spend 20 hours or more a month on all types of school board duties. That's more than the equivalent of half of a normal work week.

Board members must seek information and keep abreast of trends in public education if lay board leadership is to be effective. Consequently, structured, planned, competent inservice school board training is a critical element. Programs of this type can best be accomplished through a combination of individual effort and initiative and through group inservice, either at the local level or through state and national organizations.

Effective board service requires a wide range of information resources in order to make wise decisions. In addition, effective school board membership requires recognition of several basic concepts, some of which are:

- School boards have three primary responsibilities: planning, setting policy and evaluating.
- School board members are both state and local officials. Though elected locally, they serve on behalf of the state Legislature.
- School boards are units of local government, the only such unit spelled out in the state constitution.
- School boards are legislative bodies, empowered to set policy within the framework of the statutes enacted by the state Legislature.
- School directors represent all of the people within the community, not one particular segment.
- Board members must become thoroughly familiar with the policies and functions of the board.

Board members must seek information and keep abreast of trends in public education if lay board leadership is to be effective. Structured, planned and competent inservice school board training is a critical element.

The honor of being selected by a community to help guide the education of their youth is one that must be earned through constant effort and strong commitment to serving others.

- Boards are not administrative bodies; neither should they be "rubber stamps" for professional educators. The fine line between policy and administrative implementation requires asking the "good question" and being fully informed.
- Boards should recognize that they represent the general public interest, which includes the children. No one else is legally charged to do that.
- Boards should hire superintendents and administrators who thoroughly understand that their role is to carry out public policy. The selection of competent administrators who recognize these responsibilities is one of the board's most important functions.
- Direction to administrators and employes should be accomplished through properly drawn policy statements. Evaluation of programs, and of administrative and employe performance, should be an intrinsic part of such policies.

Public Guide to Pennsylvania School Boards, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1979.

School board members' basic duties and responsibilities

The basic law governing the provisions for, and operation of, public schools is contained in the state constitution. The General Assembly, while it holds supremacy in matters of public education, actually is the constitutionally ordained school board of the state. Although retaining its plenary powers, it meets its obligations to public education through the delegation of power and authority to boards of school directors for local governance.

Primarily, the General Assembly created school districts and school boards to carry out the constitutional mandates of a "thorough and efficient" system of public education. In addition, the Legislature has created the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, the intermediate unit structure and other state agencies. These agencies administer the state laws that control the state's public education system. There are, therefore, several governing influences upon a board of school directors.

The primary compilation of the statutes enacted by the Legislature having direct and pertinent reference to public education, its programs, its operation and its management is a publication distributed by the Department of Education called *The School Laws of Pennsylvania.* Divided into two parts, the first of the Public School Code of 1949 (as amended), which contains specific laws covering education. Such laws are contained in sections 101 through 2702. The second portion of this volume consists of laws or excerpts of laws not a part of the School Code, that deal with or affect public schools less directly. Sections 2801 through 4009 are referenced in this part of the school laws.

Besides enactments of the Legislature and the provisions of the constitution, there are other influences on the local board. These include the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, the guidelines of the Department of Education, the opinions and interpretations of the Department of Justice and court decrees. The opinions of the Justice Department and the court rulings serve from time to time to clarify legislative enactments relative to school matters.

Some Pennsylvania school laws are mandatory while others are discretionary. Initially, a school board is an agent of the General Assembly within the specific authority granted to it. A school board has inherent rights in those areas not specifically denied it by the General Assembly.

The local board is designated by law to administer the public schools and it has all the powers necessary to carry out this function with the exception of those reserved by the General Assembly.

Some of the basic duties and responsibilities of local school boards are listed here with appropriate sections of the School Code or legislative enactments noted.

Local school boards are influenced by state laws, provisions of the constitution, rules and regulations of the State Board, PDE guidelines, Justice Department opinions and court decrees.

Some permissive school board functions

- Adopt rules and regulations to govern its own affairs and the conduct of employes (Sec. 407, 510).
- Establish high schools, vocational schools, area vocational-technical institutes, community colleges, kindergartens or various other types of schools, but in some cases only with the approval of the Department of Education (Sec. 502, 701 and 1840.1-1853 inclusive).
- Elect and appoint assistant superintendents (Act 1 of 1974).

- Appoint a solicitor and other board employes (Sec. 324, 406).
- Purchase, receive or condemn land for school purposes as determined by the board (Sec. 702, 703, 704 and 721).
- Sell unneeded lands and buildings (Sec. 707).
- Enter into written agreements with boards, or other districts, for attendance and tuition of pupils in high school (Sec. 1608).
- Authorize and pay pupil transportation to places of interest and educational value (Sec. 517 and 1361).
- Provide for food or milk for undernourished and poor children (Sec. 1335).
- Discharge a professional employe under certain conditions after a hearing (Sec. 1129).
- Remove a district superintendent or assistant superintendent from office for proper cause after a hearing (Sec. 1080).
- Create or increase indebtedness within certain limitations (Sec. 631, 632).
- Permit religious instruction on released time and provide for secondary elective courses in religious literature (Sec. 1515, 1546).
- Authorize attendance of board members or of the superintendent or other employes at educational meetings, and pay necessary expenses (Sec. 516, 516.1 and 517).
- Organize school safety patrols (Sec. 510).
- Request the court to appoint special police, and also to provide for street crossing guards (Sec. 778).
- Enter into group insurance contracts (Sec. 513).
- Provide for insurance on school buildings and property (Sec. 774).
- Provide for personal liability insurance for school employes against injury to pupils (Sec. 774).
- Provide accident insurance for pupils against injury in participation, or transportation to, athletic games (Sec. 511[f]).
- Suspend or expel pupils from school under certain conditions, or cause them to be brought before the juvenile court (Sec. 1318, 1338).
- Provide free transportation of public and nonpublic pupils under certain circumstances (Sec. 1312, 1331, 2541-2 and Act 372 of 1972).

Basic characteristics of an effective school director

The ability to function as one member of a nine-member governing board of school directors is not determined by sex, occupation, race, income or social standing. Effective school board members, however, are characterized by the following:

- A deep desire to serve children, and a strong belief in the values of public schools and local control of public education.
- The ability to work as a team, to engage in open give-and-take and to support the decisions of group consensus.
- The willingness to spend the time required to become informed and to take part in effective school board meetings.
- Recognition that the school district is probably one of the largest businesses and employers in the community. As a board member, to accept the responsibility for overseeing that the enterprise is well managed.

Some required board duties

- Adopt courses of study in consultation with the superintendent (Sec. 1512, 1605).
- Specify time and place for board meetings, and meet at least once every two months (Sec. 421).
- Take action on certain matters only by an affirmative vote of the majority of all members of the board, duly recorded, showing how each member voted (Sec. 508).
- Establish the length of the school term (Sec. 1501, 1503).
- Adopt textbooks (Sec. 803).
- Retain permanently the minutes, the auditor's annual reports, each annual financial report and other documents (Sec. 518).

- Elect superintendents (Act 1 of 1974).
- Employ necessary employes (Sec. 508).
- Enter into written contracts with professional employes (Sec. 1121) and into collective bargaining agreements (Act 195 of 1970).
- Adopt the annual budget (Sec. 664, 687).
- Levy taxes (Sec. 603, 653-666 inclusive, and 672-695 inclusive).
- Appoint a tax collector under certain circumstances (Sec. 683).
- Provide necessary grounds and school buildings (Sec. 701).
- Precribe, adopt and enforce reasonable rules and regulations regarding school activities, publications and organizations (Sec. 511).
- Display the United States flag upon or near each public school building, and within each school building (Sec. 771).
- Pay tuition to other districts under certain conditions (Sec. 1306-1308, 1310, 1313, 1315, 1372, 1376, 1607, 1609 and 1809).
- Provide special education for mentally or physically handicapped children (Sec. 1372).
- Provide for a school census of students (Sec. 1351).

Some prohibited actions

- The board may not authorize construction of schools without prior approval of plans and specifications by the departments of Education and Labor and Industry (Sec. 731, 3148).
- Use of funds for any purpose other than that for which budgeted is prohibited except when approved by a two-thirds vote of members of the board. The board does have the power to transfer funds within the budget (Sec. 609).
- The board may not hire work to be done, or purchase materials, or enter into contracts that will cause sums budgeted for specific purposes to be exceeded (Sec. 609, 687[b]).
- It is not permissible for the board to authorize any other payment of school funds unless sufficient funding is available (Sec. 607).

The Legislature created the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, the IU structure and other state agencies. They administer the state laws that control the state's public education system.

- The school board may not pay out public school funds in any manner or for any purpose not provided by school law (Sec. 610).
- Employment of relatives of board members in the school district is prohibited except by a majority vote of the board, excluding the member who is related to the employer or applicant (Sec. 1111).
- No board shall demand, request or accept in any way a gift from a teacher or supervisor (Sec. 327).
- A board shall not require religious or political tests of any officer or employe (Sec. 108).
- A board shall not dismiss a professional employe except for causes enumerated in the school laws, by following designated procedures, and after a hearing, except by a two-thirds vote of the board (Sec. 1122-1130).
- A board shall not permit a child to attend school without proper immunizations (Sec. 1303[a]).
- A board shall not refuse accommodation or make any distinction in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and the high schools, to any pupil because of race, creed or color (Sec. 1310, 3507).

Penalties and cautions that apply

- Possible removal from office for refusal, or neglect, to perform duties, on petition of 10 resident taxpayers to the court (Sec. 318).
- Possible withholding of state appropriation if board accepts gifts or donations from teachers (Sec. 327).
- Possible withholding or forfeiture of state appropriation if board refuses or neglects

to comply with and enforce the school attendance law (Sec. 1357).

- Possible withholding or forfeiture of state appropriation if board fails to provide competent teachers to teach required subjects (Sec. 1005).
- Possible withholding of state appropriation for failure of board to report indebtedness, or to make payment of indebtedness when due (Sec. 633).
- Possible withholding of state appropriation for failure to file reports required by the Department of Education (Sec. 2552).
- Possible withholding of state appropriation for failure to pay rentals due to the State Public School Building Authority (Sec. 785).
- New school directors must qualify for office within 10 days of the beginning of their terms of office, or may have their offices declared vacant by the school board (Sec. 319).
- School directors may have their offices declared vacant by the remaining members of the board for refusing the act as a school director or for neglecting or refusing to attend two successive regular meetings, except for sickness or absence from the district (Sec. 319).
- School directors, under penalty of losing office, as well as of fine or imprisonment or both, must not receive bribes to secure their election or to influence their votes on the board (Sec. 326, 810).
- School directors voting for a school order for payment of funds for any other purposes, or drawn in any other manner than provided by school law, are individually liable to surcharge (Sec. 608).
- Any school official who knowingly falsifies any report or certificate required for the purpose of obtaining any reimbursement under the school laws shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, is subject to fine or imprisonment or both (Sec. 2524).
- No board member shall vote on roll call in dismissal of a professional employe after a board hearing if related in a specified manner to the teacher or to any of the parties instituting the complaint (Sec. 1111, 1129).

PSBA: Serving public interest in public education

The date was January 9, 1896. The weather in Harrisburg was cold and windy. Snow was forecast. A glance at the newspapers of the day found several nostalgic items of interest.

Congress celebrated the battle of New Orleans and Jackson Day. A subcommittee on foreign affairs considered the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands. The threat of war loomed over Europe. Politicians claimed that the U.S. currency system must be reformed.

Another item on the front pages of the Harrisburg newspapers that day said some 153 school directors from 39 counties journeyed to the capital for the first organized and formal gathering of local board members in the state.

Probably that small group of local officials did not realize how significant their meeting was to become. It was the birth of the Pennsylvania State School Directors Association as an independent organization.

Organized officially the year before (1895), under the leadership of H.H. Quimby, Phoenixville, this small group of school directors became the first association of board members in the nation. Quimby and his associates began a movement that was to slowly, but surely, establish school boards associations in the various states and ultimately, the National School Boards Association in 1938.

Formed on the fundamental concept of local control of public education, PSBA was built on the proposition that the American school board — elected lay citizens making decisions that affect and direct the education of the nation's youth — is the cornerstone of a free society.

From 1896 until 1937, the organization was primarily nurtured and carried forward through the efforts of volunteer, elected officers of the association. A traveling or corresponding secretary managed the meager funds of the organization and did the necessary administrative tasks to conduct an annual state conference.

During the next 40 years, the association showed remarkable growth, which is a credit to the volunteer officers who sustained and directed the fledgling organization in those early years.

Then in 1937, Preston O. Van Ness was elected as the first full-time executive secretary. At that time there were about 800 member districts out of some 2,500. It was under Van Ness's direction, and the dedicated board members and officers who served with him, that the stage was set for PSBA's rapid growth.

Van Ness reflected at his retirement in 1959, "Those early days were precarious. When I took over as executive secretary, the association was $500 in debt and it appeared we would have to borrow money to get started. But we opened up temporary quarters in my home and set about to get more membership. We never had to borrow money."

The association did grow. By 1945 it had more than 2,000 members and in 1958 almost 26 counties had 100% membership. In 1959 Van Ness and the PSBA Executive Board accomplished a long-time ambition by purchasing the three-story property at 410 N. Third Street in Harrisburg. That became the state headquarters until the association acquired more modern, efficient offices in 1971. Prior to 1959, the association operated out of several locations in Harrisburg.

Van Ness, a former teacher, administrator and long-term board member,

PSBA was formed on the concept that local control — elected lay citizens making decisions that affect and direct education — is the cornerstone of a free society.

guided the organization through its formative years. Prior to his retirement, John J. Hertz was appointed as associate executive secretary. In 1960, after a long tenure as a Pennsylvania educator, with a strong background in school business affairs, Hertz took over the reins as PSBA's second executive.

During his 10 years, the organization had the largest number of member boards. At the same time, through reorganization, the number of district boards began to diminish, from about 2,500 in 1946 to about 1,600 in 1965. Consolidation steadily reduced school boards until the pre-1970 figure totaled about 850. By 1970 the number of districts was reduced to 504 with one nonoperating district. The current number is 501.

The school directors association and the school board secretaries association merged into the present PSBA in 1962. In 1963, Hertz and several attorneys organized the Pennsylvania School Board Solicitors Association, one of the first such groups in the nation specializing in school-related law. The solicitors group and the Conference of School Districts of the Second Class (also 1963) both became departments of PSBA.

When Hertz retired in 1969, the association had an operating budget of about $300,000, had paid off the building on Third Street and provided the resources for further services to local school districts.

The second headquarters facility of PSBA, at 412 N. Second St., was purchased in 1971 and an addition, completed in 1977, almost doubled available office space.

PSBA's first permanent office building, located at 410 N. Third St., was purchased in 1959 and sold in 1971 when the association purchased another property. A modern facility has replaced the Third Street building.

Fred M. Heddinger, a former Wilkinsburg school director for 18 years and past PSBA president, succeeded Hertz as executive director in 1970. Under his leadership, PSBA developed many new programs, including:

- The PSBA Insurance Trust, a pioneering concept to assist member school districts to secure access to whatever insurance they desired at the lowest possible cost.
- Expanded information and publications to serve the needs of school management and local school boards.
- Development of a comprehensive data and information gathering system.
- Establishment of a variety of employe relations support programs.
- Creation of one of the most complete policy manual services found anywhere, geared to local school districts and Pennsylvania law.

- Acquisition in 1971 of a new headquarters facility at 412 N. Second Street in Harrisburg. This modern building was expanded in 1977, doubling available space. The entire facility was paid for prior to Heddinger's retirement in June 1982.

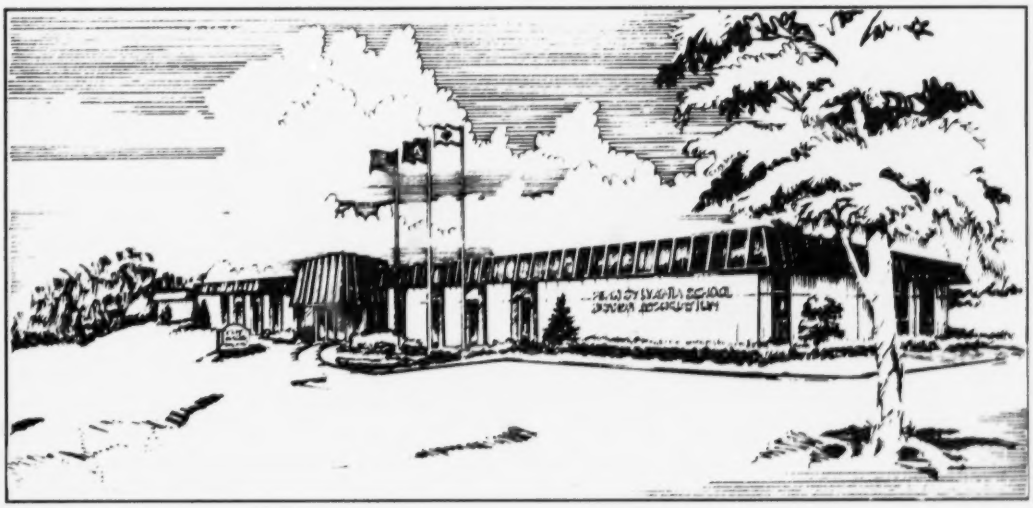
By the time Joseph V. Oravitz succeeded Heddinger as executive director, the association had grown from a handful of employes in 1970 to a staff of 43 full-time professional and support personnel.

When Oravitz became executive director, he emphasized organizational cooperation, increased personal service to every member district and broadened participation in PSBA activities by school directors throughout the state. He focused on leadership in public education that would move PSBA to a high degree of involvement on all issues facing the governance of local schools.

Planning has always been a high priority with Oravitz. A five-year plan he submitted to the Executive Board in 1982 was accomplished within three years. As a result, in March 1985 the board adopted a new five-year program that charts an ambitious agenda to carry the association through to 1990.

In March 1986, the PSBA staff of 50 completed the move into the new headquarters facility in New Cumberland, the association's third "home," with approximately 28,000 square feet and ample parking. The new headquarters increases the efficiency of operations in all areas of service and brings additional meaning to PSBA's pursuits on behalf of public education and local school officials.

The progress of the association is a reflection of the people who freely give of their time, serving their community and state association. It is a grassroots democracy in action. It is a process worth preserving. It is the only reason for our existence: To ensure the best education possible for our children by preserving the local control vested in local elected school officials in each of our communities throughout the commonwealth.



In March 1986, PSBA staff completed the move into the present headquarters in New Cumberland, the association's third "home," with approximately 28,000 square feet and ample parking. The facility increased the efficiency of operations in all service areas.

Code of Ethics for Pennsylvania School Board Members

I. As a member of my local board of education, representing all the citizens of my school district, I recognize:

(1) That my fellow citizens have entrusted me with the educational development of the children and youth of this community.

(2) That the public expects my first and greatest concern to be in the best interest of each and every one of these young people without distinction as to who they are or what their background may be.

(3) That the future welfare of this community of this state, and of the nation, depends in the largest measure upon the quality of education we provide in the public schools to fit the needs of every learner.

(4) That my fellow board members and I must take the initiative in helping all the people of this community to have all the facts, all the time, about their schools, to the end that they will readily provide the finest possible school program, school staff, and school facilities.

(5) That legally, the authority of the board is derived from the General Assembly which ultimately controls the organization and operation of the school district and which determines the degree of discretionary power left with the board and the people of this community for the exercise of local autonomy.

(6) That I must never neglect my personal obligation to the community and my legal obligation to the state, nor surrender these responsibilities to any other person, group or organization; but that, beyond these, I have a moral and civic obligation to the nation which can remain strong and free only so long as public schools in the United States of America are kept free and strong.

II. In view of the foregoing considerations, it shall be my constant endeavor:

(1) To devote time, thought, and study to the duties and responsibilities of a school board member so that I may render effective and creditable service.

(2) To work with my fellow board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion that arise during vigorous debate of points at issue.

(3) To base my personal decision upon all available facts in each situation; to vote my honest conviction in every case, unswayed by partisan bias of any kind; thereafter, to abide by and uphold the final majority decision of the board.

(4) To remember at all times that as an individual I have no legal authority outside the meetings of the board, and to conduct my relationships with the school staff, the local citizenry, and all media of communication on the basis of this fact.

(5) To resist every temptation and outside pressure to use my position as a school board member to benefit either myself or any other individual or agency apart from the total interest of the school district.

(6) To recognize that it is as important for the board to understand and eval-

uate the educational program of the schools as it is to plan for the business of the school operation.

(7) To bear in mind under all circumstances that the primary function of the board is to establish the policies by which the schools are to be administered, but that the administration of the educational program and the conduct of school business shall be left to the employed superintendent of schools and his professional and non-professional staff.

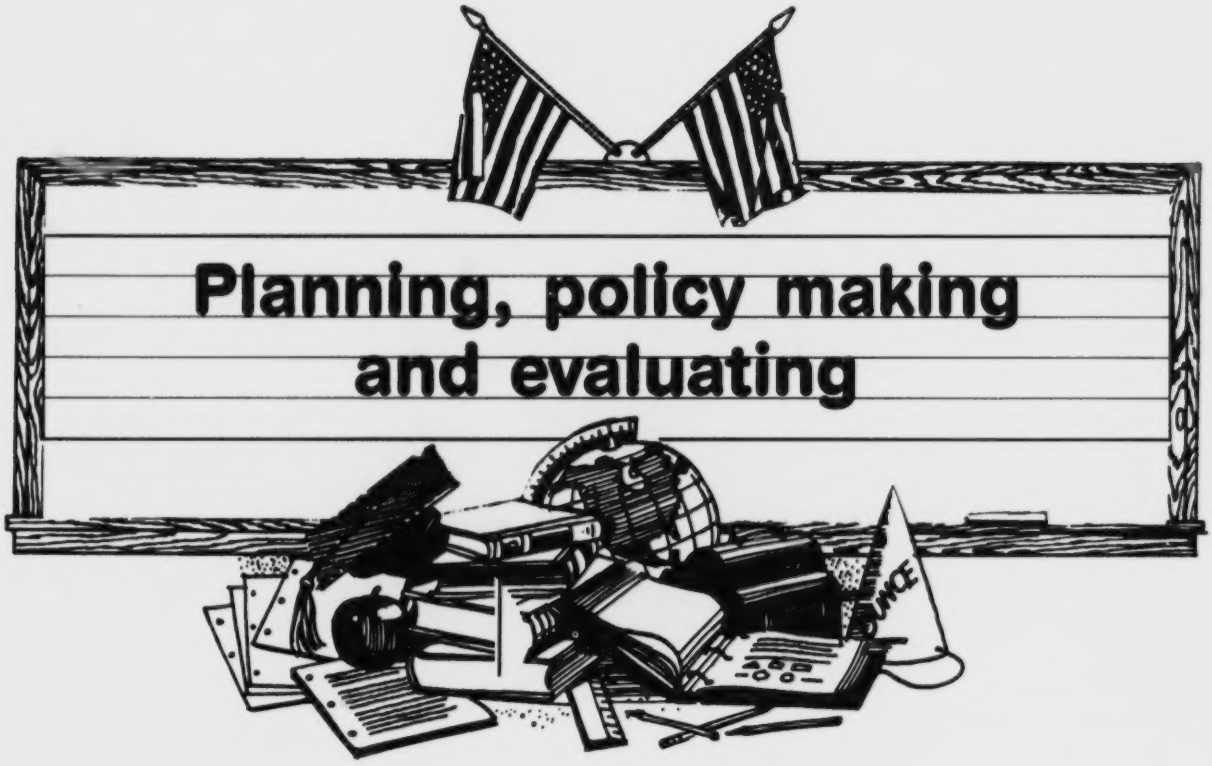
(8) To welcome and encourage active cooperation by citizens, organizations, and the media of communication in the district with respect to establishing policy on current school operation and proposed future developments.

(9) To support my state and national school boards associations.

(10) Finally, to strive, step by step, toward ideal conditions for most effective school board service to my community, in a spirit of teamwork and devotion to public education as the greatest instrument for the preservation and perpetuation of our representative democracy.

Reprinted from The Beliefs, Policies and Bylaws of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, as amended, February 1977.

CHAPTER 2



Planning, policy making and evaluating

23 The board's responsibilities

27 Policy development: A school board's basis for evaluation

33 Policy making: A board member's perspective on management input

37 Policy making: An administrator's perspective on management input

The board's responsibilities

A board of education is a legislative body. Its function is not to operate the schools, but to see that they are run effectively. Effective boards concentrate their time and energy on determining what it is the schools should accomplish and developing policies to carry out these goals. They avoid day-to-day administrative questions except to ensure that the administration of the schools is effective and efficient, and that it reflects the policies established by the board.

In essence, school boards have three functions: planning, enacting policy and evaluating results.

Planning

Boards are required to engage in long-range planning by regulations of the State Board of Education. Appropriate reports of the results of such planning must be filed with the Department of Education.

Researching information about the present and likely future needs of the district and planning to meet those needs are closely related activities. For example:

- Project enrollments for 10 years using birth records, housing starts and census data.
- Translate projected increases or decreases into building allocations, staffing needs and anticipated budget requiremens as to income sources and amounts, as well as expenditures.

Normally, enrollment projections are based on past trends adjusted for anticipated changes. Thus, a district that has experienced an average annual increase in enrollment over the past years may assume the trend will continue unless reasons to modify this projection can be identified.

Good planning also involves looking at how anticipated enrollments will impact on staffing requirements. Many districts that are growing will, **as a matter of policy,** seek new faculty members to provide a balance in terms of age, sex, race and the colleges from which they received training.

Districts with decreasing enrollments are required by law to furlough teachers strictly by seniority. This law can cause some interesting (and not always educationally desirable) reassignments based on certification.

In addition to the regular budget process, school districts benefit when the board engages in long-term financial planning, projected for at least five years. This planning should include:

- Tentative operating budgets on what the professional staff believes to be needed to finance its plans for educational programs.
- Methods of financing projected building needs — either of new buildings, additions to existing buildings, or remodeling of existing structures, or the closing, sales or rental of unneeded, obsolete structures.
- Projections of assessed valuations and other income sources.

These three factors should be used to provide a specific plan for the long term. Where either budgetary requests or building needs must be postponed, all concerned should understand the reasons as well as the board's plan to do something about it in the future.

Such planning is especially well suited to citizens' advisory committees. Talented, knowledgeable, interested citizens can give

Local control of education means the policies governing the operation of schools are to be formed in response to local needs.

valuable recommendations to the board. Furthermore, as some or all of the recommendations are adopted, the board will have a nucleus of informed citizens whose first-hand experience with the problems of school financing makes them invaluable allies.

Policy function

The central responsibility of a board, both in theory and in law, is to be the policy-forming body. The idea of local control of education means the policies governing the operation of schools are to be formed in response to local needs and desires.

Policy means actions of the board that set written goals and objectives for the school. When a board adopts a policy providing for kindergarten, for instance, it says the community values educating five-year-olds. At the same time, it authorizes and directs the administration to implement this policy by providing space, purchasing materials and equipment, and seeking teachers.

The job of the administration is to take action as directed and empowered by board policy to put the policy into operation. Because the board is an agency of the commonwealth, its policy must comply with state law and regulations.

Policy is for the long term. Consequently, it must be broadly stated with room for adjustment to fit special circumstances. Good policy sets goals. The means to be used to achieve these goals may need to change as the situation changes. A wise board phrases its policies so that they may continue, even as the means to bring them about may need to be modified.

Once the intent of the board is set by policy, the administration is responsible to act to achieve these goals. In order to do this, administrative regulations must be developed. **This responsibility lies with the administration, not with the board.** The regulations developed by the administration, however, must be consistent with the policy and limited by it since the authority the administration has is derived from board policy.

Policy is broad and general. Regulations are detailed and specific. In order for the administration to do the job for which it has been employed, it must be able to make and enforce regulations and change them as the situation demands.

For instance, board policy may set the length of the school day. Administrative regulations, in accordance with this policy, would specify when teachers are to report, when students are to report, when lunch time is to occur, when students are to be dismissed, and so forth. The basic decision is board responsibility. The details of carrying out that decision are administrative.

All boards have policies. In some districts, these are a loose amalgamation of action recorded in minutes and tradition. Most boards have found it advisable to codify their policies into writing and place them in a policy book. This has two primary advantages.

- Putting policy into writing gives everyone the opportunity to be sure what it is that the board is saying. Once the policies are in writing, administration, faculty and the community in general have a clear opportunity to be informed about the goals and objectives of the board.
- Since the responsibility of administration is to carry out board policy, the effectiveness of the administration can be more clearly measured by matching the results against policy.

The idea that the board makes policy and the administration carries it out is an oversimplification. Good policy results when a board makes decisions with a clear understanding of what problems face the schools and of the possible alternatives available, a realistic view of the costs that will result from the acceptance of each of the possible alternatives, and a reasonable understanding of what results can be expected from each possible course of action.

The superintendent, as the professional adviser to the board, is responsible for providing the board with most of the informa-

Evaluating the results of the board's planning is the third and final responsibility of the board. It is also the most difficult. In fact, evaluation leads to more planning.

tion necessary to make wise decisions. When policy is under consideration, the superintendent should be diligent in providing members of the board all the information needed, along with the professional recommendation as to which of the alternatives is preferable. Such recommendations should be documented with appropriate facts and rationale.

In policy formation, the superintendent has two responsibilities. First, to assist the board in reaching a decision through marshalling information and making a recommendation. Secondly, to ensure that the policy is put into effect, regardless of whether or not the recommendation is accepted.

A process of systematic policy review contributes significantly to the smooth operation of a school district. Some policies have a predictably short life span. Others are subject to review less frequently, usually when the board experiences a significant turnover among its members.

Evaluating results

The board can accomplish much by developing a program of **self-evaluation.** If for no other reason, this helps to avoid the "we've always done it that way" resistance to improvements.

Some boards use outside facilitators to study their operation, analyze it and make recommendations for the consideration of the directors. Others do much on their own. Study and discussion sessions held privately to assess the degree to which directors are satisfied with the functioning of the board, coupled with frank reactions from the superintendent and the other members of the administrative team, can greatly enhance board effectiveness.

Evaluating the result of the board's planning is the third and final responsibility of the board. It is also the most difficult. Evaluation "completes the loop" and, in fact, leads inevitably to more planning.

As a board engages in evaluating its own policies it can reach one of three major conclusions:

- Policy, as planned, is working well; let's keep it in place.
- Policy needs to be retained, but let's refine it.
- Policy seemed like a good idea at the time, but let's drop it.

Good policy results when a board makes decisions with a clear understanding of what problems face the schools and of possible alternatives available, a realistic view of costs, and reasonable understanding of what results can be expected.

Evaluation occurs all the time, both formally and informally. Many districts set aside a weekend every year to review the results of the previous year's planning session and to plan additional short-term (one-year) goals and long-term (five-year) objectives. That's one way to engage in formal evaluation of both programs and policies.

In a less formal way, board members should be receiving information orally, at meetings, and in writing, between meetings, to constantly keep them up-to-date on a broad range of activities that are in progress regarding board policy proclamations.

Exactly how the board should be receiving the "results" and how the success will be measured or judged are a large part of what sometimes makes evaluation so difficult. By way of analogy, the board, like customers in a restaurant ordering a meal, will not be satisfied if they are served chopped sirloin and mashed potatoes when they are expecting filet mignon and french fries. The district superintendent, like a waiter, has an obligation to learn what kind of expectations the board has and what price they are willing to pay. Board members shouldn't expect high quality if they are unwilling to pay the advertised price.

Board members are in the people business, which is subjective. The administration is not going to please all board members all the time, but a wise superintendent will seek or sense enough direction and agreement on exactly what the board expects by way of results and will strive to produce the desired outcomes.

Different data say different things. Whereas it's relatively easy to measure a

Policy must be broadly stated with room for adjustment to fit special circumstances. Good policy sets goals.

goal such as 5% less absenteeism, it's not as easy to conclude that a decline in certain test scores means the quality of teaching is deteriorating. "Results" no matter how delivered, anecdotally or numerically, are, like truth and beauty, "in the eye of the beholder."

Imperfections notwithstanding, the evaluation process is the last step in a three-step process, which is really a never-ending cyclical process. This year's results inevitably drive the organization to continue to plan and enact policy, which in turn needs to be evaluated.

Board members work on the system, even while it is in motion. They are the civilians elected by the populace to give direction to the commissioned officers (superintendents and assistants), who in turn use the non-coms (principals), who in turn supervise those in the trenches (the faculty). Board members provide the system the financial support and the leadership to help make sure the never-ending battle is won.

Policy development: A school board's basis for evaluation

Good school management must have a solid foundation of policy to accomplish desired goals and objectives that the public and dedicated school people want. Many articles and dissertations on the subject of written policy describe it as a complex, difficult and elusive procedure, which tends to create, in the minds of those responsible, a fear of the process. Therefore, essential policy is not developed. This idea adversely affects the necessary ingredient for good schools and good management.

From conversations and discussions with school board members and administrators throughout Pennsylvania, it is quite obvious that the greatest obstacle to achieving good management is proper role identification of the various members of the management team.

Since the advent of collective bargaining in Pennsylvania in 1970, numerous changes have taken place in the management of public schools. One notable change is the emergence of a strong management team concept.

The **management team** is defined to include the board of school directors, the superintendent, other central office administrators, business officials, building principals and other personnel having administrative or supervisory responsibilities.

As the illustration on page 28 shows, the management team is composed of the policy team and the administrative team. Add the instructional team and the three triangles constitute the education team.

The **policy team** consists of the nine board members and the superintendent, a group often referred to as "the team of 10" since the superintendent, by law, is a nonvoting member of the school board.

Superintendents are the linchpins between the policy team with whom they sit and the administrative team of which superintendents are the leaders. The **administrative team** consists of middle management people, typically including central administrative staff, building principals and assistant principals.

Building principals are the linchpins of the **instructional team** which consists of teachers and other professional employes in each building.

After years of collective bargaining, the term management team often conjurs up an image of "us and them," as between employer and employe.

The policy team and the administrative team are part of a much larger team — the education team. No one group can do it alone. Effective instructional activities are enhanced when all three groups work together.

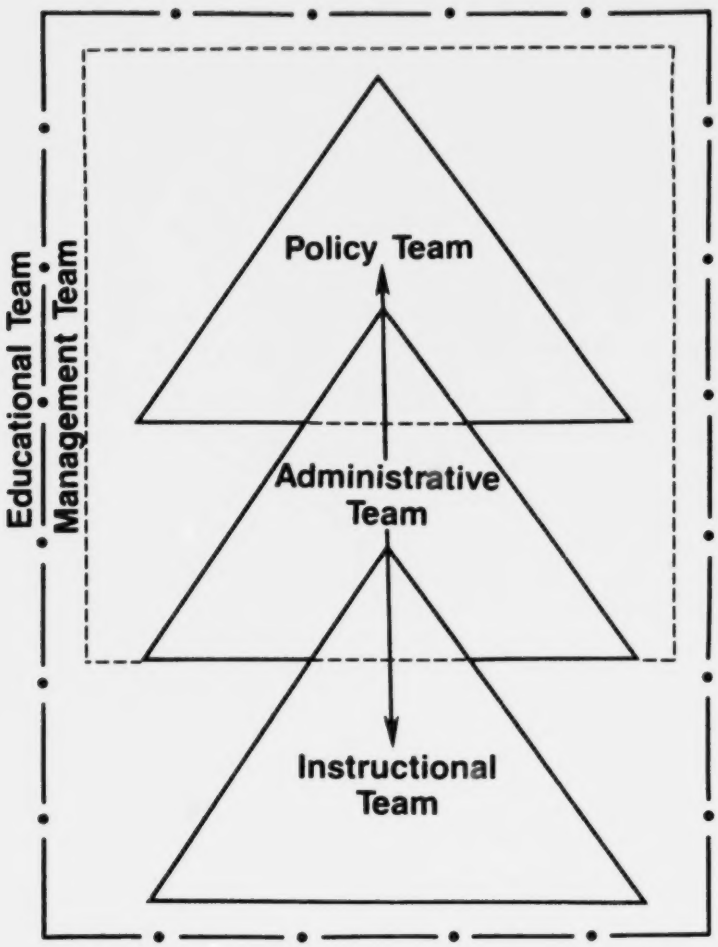
Criticisms have been heard from both school board members and administrators that one or the other oversteps responsibility and authority, which then leads to a somewhat tense and frustrating situation. It is difficult to understand that this seemingly simple problem cannot be solved by reasonable people, whose dedication to good education is so evident in the school

Policy development involves study, research, recommendation, evaluation, adoption and implementation. The process does not have to be difficult, despite the fact that it deals with rather complex issues.

systems of Pennsylvania. The difficulty seems to rest with the inability to provide a strong foundation which allows the individual, through the corporate process, to achieve the desired effects for education.

Involve staff

Policy development does not have to be a difficult process despite the fact that it deals with rather complex issues. It involves study, research, recommendation, evaluation, adoption and implementation. The process begins with the involvement of the administrative staff in conducting an initial study of needed policies to carry out the operation of the schools, and concludes with the same administrative team implementing the policies legislated by the board of school directors for the direction of the educational program in a given school district.



The steps between recommendation and implementation are the factors that need to be clarified.

What is policy and what is it expected to do? School board policy making is a legislative process assigned to local school boards through the Pennsylvania Constitution, which charges the Legislature to establish, maintain, and finance a system of public education. This charge gives the Legislature complete power over education and school districts in the commonwealth.

Because the Legislature could not possibly direct every detail of every school district, it has created local school boards and charged them with the responsibility to carry out the Legislature's task in locally defined areas — school districts. Also, the Legislature could not — and should not — include in its laws all the details necessary to operate these school districts efficiently. Therefore, written into the Public School Code are certain rights, duties, and responsibilities for these local school boards.

It is from this legislative assignment that school boards derive their authority to enact policy, and as long as these actions by local school boards are within the parameters set forth by the Legislature, such actions carry the force of law within their prescribed jurisdictions.

Legal basis

Several citations may emphasize this policy making power more clearly. Section 211 of the School Code states: "The several school districts in this commonwealth shall be, and hereby are vested as, bodies corporate, with all necessary powers to enable them to carry out the provisions of this act."

Section 407 of the School Code states: "Each board of school directors may adopt reasonable rules and regulations for its government and control." Sections 501 and 502 charge the school board to establish, equip, furnish, maintain and operate elementary and secondary schools.

Section 510 is an excellent citation in that it specifically authorizes the school board to **adopt** and **enforce** such reasonable rules and regulations as it may deem necessary, regarding the management of

The question is not whether to develop a policy manual, but rather how and when it can be done.

school affairs and the conduct and deportment of employes and students.

What is policy?

What is a policy as it is developed, adopted and implemented in a school district?

Policy defines clearly the goals and objectives for carrying out the responsibility for providing schools to educate young people on behalf of the state as a whole. This shared power assures equity, while at the same time providing a system that is responsible to local and individual needs. Policy, therefore, becomes a communication device that spells out with clarity the intent of the elected officials, allowing enough flexibility for good management skills to be utilized in meeting the individual educational needs of students and the general public.

Policy can be based on long-range and short-range goals and should allow for the flexibility that is vital in the day-to-day operation of a school system. Policy must convey necessary information to the members of the board, the administrators, and the entire staff as well as to the community at large, which benefits from and supports the educational process.

Often policy is perceived as only for the school staff and, therefore, boards have assumed that certain aspects are not needed. Consequently, policies are often enacted that are rather general in nature, that do not communicate very clearly, and many times become useless in serving the total school district.

Enhancing accountability

A policy should state a clear purpose, identify the authority, and state the delegation of responsibility if it is to serve all concerned. Policies are intended to enhance accountability, and for this reason play a very important role in the evaluation process of a school system. It is difficult to improve a situation if those involved do not have an outline, in writing, of what is expected of them. Well-defined policy is the basis for any evaluation program that is to be used in governing and improving the schools.

Policy also must define roles and responsibilities for school directors, administrators, and the entire staff. School board members may tend to say that the staff is not performing well and, therefore, assume staff roles. The administration may be critical of the staff for not carrying out its responsibilities, and may also be critical of the board for its lack of understanding of the technical aspects of education. The staff tends to criticize the administration for its lack of leadership and sensitivity and, at the same time, criticizes the board for not supplying the needed resources to provide a program that guarantees success and acceptance in the community.

Policy therefore:

- Has the force of law.
- Clearly communicates goals and objectives.
- Defines roles.
- Identifies accountability as a basis for evaluation.

Review current procedures

In the process of developing good policy, a review must be made of existing policies, employe handbooks, current policies in effect, past practices of the district and any other items that may affect policy. These should be compiled, reviewed and identified for change or lack of coverage. They should then be categorized according to an established, codified system for ready reference and maintenance. A 10-category system of codification might be: 000 — Local Board Procedures; 100 — Programs; 200 — Pupils; 300 — Administrative Employes; 400 — Professional Employes; 500 — Classified Employes; 600 — Finances; 700 — Property; 800 — Operations; and 900 — Community, as taken from PSBA's *Policy Guides for Pennsylvania Schools.*

The administration, staff and board

Good policy is necessary for good schools and good management.

Policy becomes a communication device that spells out with clarity the intent of elected officials, and allows flexibility for good management skills to be used to meet the individual educational needs of students and the public.

must now provide input in identifying areas in which policy is needed. This may be done by forming task forces of key administrative personnel to provide background information based on the day-to-day operation of the educational system. Board members may be included on these task forces in an effort to help them to better understand the operational aspects of the schools.

After the needs for new policies have been identified, it is necessary to begin formulating the needed policies. This can be greatly assisted by the utilization of a policy guidance system such as that provided by PSBA, which is legally sound, up-to-date and based on good management practices, but at the same time allows for the necessary flexibility required for an individual district. Many policies have been written in which an administrator, working in isolation, has reinvented the "policy wheel" one more time, after many unnecessary and laborious hours of research and creative writing.

When the first draft copy of policy has been formulated, it should be reviewed by the original task force for inconsistencies, both practical and legal, and for difficulty of implementation. It should also be viewed in light of the overall goals and objectives of the school district.

The final draft is prepared and may then be recommended by the superintendent to the board for adoption. The board then either formally adopts the policies or directs further development. The policies are then printed in final form for distribution to those locations where such policy can efficiently serve the district by articulating the intent and purpose of the district's programs for education.

Policies must be fully implemented by the administrative staff, which will develop the necessary administrative guidelines, procedures, regulations and required forms. This process allows for: proper review; appropriate legal considerations; corporate approval; flexibility, for good management; and a way to make policy a solid foundation for communicating the goals and objectives of the school district.

Competent professional assistance is available to provide Pennsylvania school districts with sound, effective policy development. The process has been designed to be relatively simple, even in dealing with the inherent complexity of many policy needs.

Perhaps the most important consideration involving policy development is the discipline required of a district, both legislatively and adminstratively, in following its own policies. There are many dusty policy manuals sitting on shelves throughout the commonwealth that are never referred to, causing the district to operate on a crisis-to-crisis, day-to-day basis.

Policy as 'game plan'

Policy might be compared to a game plan developed for a football team. The coach, after much practice, much forethought, and a review of all the scouting information available, determines a plan to achieve success. It is recognized that the opposition will be trying to create situations to force abandonment of the game plan and bring about ultimate defeat.

School districts go through a similar process in the development of their goals and objectives (a policy manual) in an effort to achieve success and provide an effective, quality educational program. Situations will develop that will pressure the board to deviate from its game plan and ultimately go down in defeat rather than meet its desired objectives.

Many examples can be cited. Each ex-

perienced school manager can more than likely cite several instances where, when the pressure was on, policy was abandoned, and management chaos resulted. This is not to say that conditions will not change. Objectives will be re-evaluated and state and federal laws and regulations will impact upon policy development or modification. Those events, however, must be dealt with through an established system of policy maintenance to assure that the manual is always up-to-date and reflects conditions as they **are,** not as they **were.** This, incidentally, is the keystone of the PSBA Policy Guide Service — a continuing update for every school board and school district engaged in the process — something that is typically the principal shortcoming of policy manual guidance.

Policies must be updated and clearly applicable. The first time the board needs policy direction and finds that its manual is not up-to-date, the board may abandon its support and dedication to policy, and another dusty document takes up space on a shelf.

Effective policy is critical to a sound foundation for good management in an effort to provide quality education for a school district. Sound policy assists in providing an efficient use of resources, an effective method for dealing with employe relations, and a way of communicating intentions to the community.

Although policy deals with these rather complex concerns, the process for development can be relatively simple if a well-thought-out procedure is utilized and assistance is provided when necessary. It is no longer a question of whether or not to develop a policy manual but, rather, it is a matter of determining **how** and **when** it can be done. And it can be done — effectively and efficiently.

Excerpted from ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *Vol. XLIII, No. 3, May-June 1979, written by* ***Dorsey E. Enck,*** *director, and* ***Barbara Hippensteel,*** *consultant, PSBA educational management services.*

Why have written policies?

- Written policies show everyone that the board is running a businesslike operation.
- They inform everyone about the board's intent, goals, and aspirations. Ambiguity, confusion, and trouble result when policies are not in writing.
- They give credence to board actions. People respect what's in writing even though they may not agree with every jot and tittle in the board's policy manual.
- They establish a legal record. This is especially important because policies carry the force of law.
- They give the public a means to evaluate board performance. Publicly pronounced policy statements prove that the board is willing to be held accountable for its decisions.
- They are impersonal. They make whimsical administration difficult.
- They foster stability and continuity. Board and staff members come and go, but the policy manual (kept updated, of course) endures and helps assure smooth transitions when organizational or staff changes occur.
- They contribute to the board's efficiency. Many routine decisions can be incorporated into written policies, thereby freeing up board meeting time for more important matters.
- They clarify board-superintendent functions. When the board establishes policy guidelines, the superintendent can get on with the daily work.
- They help disarm crackpot critics. The accusations of local cranks seldom prevail in districts that have clearcut and timely written policies that reflect thorough research, sound judgment, and careful planning.

Policy making: A board member's perspective on management input

"Principals and administrators are making board policy — usurping the board's elective responsibility. How could I explain that to my constituents? I can't let that happen."

Sound familiar? Ever had those comments leveled at you, or harbored those thoughts? If your answer is "yes," or "maybe," or "I never thought of my directorship in those terms," then you probably have lots of company. School directors have widely diversified feelings, experiences and perspectives in understanding and executing their policy-making function.

This article examines some of the expectations, beliefs, and barriers held by the Penn Hills school board as a group and as individual members as we entered into the process with PSBA to develop a policy manual. If you see yourself or one of your fellow board members in these perspectives, don't be surprised. We are a fairly typical cross-section of school boards.

Our objective was clear: To codify existing policies, to reorganize, to separate and clarify administrative procedures currently intermingled with policies, and to synthesize the product into a useful form that would better serve the board, administration, staff, the students and the community.

The method needed to accomplish that goal, however, was not that clear. Over the previous decade, several attempts at producing a useful, agreed-upon policy manual had failed. Even though those prior efforts resulted in something that we labeled a policy manual, it was never fully accepted or understood by all board members.

The criticisms and misunderstandings of such policy manuals were expressed in statements of denial and derision, such as "I never voted for it, so I'm not bound by it," or "It's too difficult to find anything; it's too fuzzy."

With that background and obvious lack of success in producing an agreed-upon policy manual after five tries in nearly 15 years, the superintendent recommended that the board enter into an agreement with PSBA to develop a policy manual. The initial contact by PSBA representatives was most useful and constructive.

First, they helped to focus the board's attention on how to go about the job of recognizing and organizing policy in general rather than getting mired down initially in specific policy details. Second, they helped focus the board's attention on the broad governance area and on the board's operations.

The next step was to determine where the district really stood in relation to policy. This was once again accomplished with the joint suggestion of PSBA personnel and the superintendent, recommending to the board that all existing prior policies, whether formally passed or not, be reviewed. Included were all administrative procedures, prior policy drafts, board minutes, various administrative manuals, superintendent's letters, department heads' letters and student and parent handbooks.

The results of that review were evaluated and policy statements or provisions were extracted from them. This formed a consistent basis for organizing and sorting out elements that truly represent board policy from those rules and guidelines that represent administrative procedure.

People are less reluctant and listen more attentively to an outsider than they will to their colleagues. Therefore, that PSBA suggestion was, in retrospect, a most valuable one. The task of performing this review

School directors have widely diversified feelings, experiences and perspectives in understanding and executing their policy-making function.

A review process allows all levels of school management to more clearly see each other's responsibilities and how all aspects of the district's operations fit together.

was accomplished by the central administration and principals, and even included student school board members. The end result of this review was a final comprehensive review by the total board.

The lessons and experience gained from this process formed the following perspectives:

- The review process forced upon all members of the administration, principals and department heads an updated familiarity with policy, especially those policies that were sprinkled throughout the district in many manuals, handbooks, various forms and letters. It also helped to point out some inconsistencies and some outdated practices that had in reality been superseded.
- Administration, principals and directors were provided an opportunity to see firsthand that their experience, their views, and their desires are really important and that their input was actually solicited by the board.
- The review process provided the opportunity for those who have responsibility for implementing the provisions of collective bargaining contracts to contribute directly to having well-written, clear policy. Principals and administrators who have seen their management capabilities eroded or diminished by fuzzy or nonexistent policy really do not want things that way, and this was the chance to correct some of these imbalances.
- The review process drew heavily on principals and first-line supervisors and their knowledge of what really works and what is really fair, and what is really good for children in the educational process.
- The review process provided for more effective implementation of policy once it was enacted. The policy had the understanding, support and backing of the staff, rather than their simply enforcing rules that were handed down with no input from them.
- Like good industrial managers, effective principals and administrators really do not desire to give up the means to control and carry out their responsibilities. By helping to develop and recommend policy, the review process demonstrated their desire to retain control and to assure that they had adequate management authority to execute policy.
- By reviewing administrative recommendations with the board prior to enactment, management at all levels had the opportunity to make their recommendations to the board and to support, defend and explain those recommendations. In short, they had the opportunity to demonstrate their desire and commitment to help guide a sound educational team.
- The management team concept gained substance through the review process. It demonstrated to all members of management that they are working as a team and have responsibilities as a team, as well as having responsibilities as individual members of that team.
- The process put the board in the position of directing and controlling the overall policy development. The right to accept, reject or modify was retained by the board. The culmination of the process was the enactment of policy that had the understanding and support of the staff, and most important, it had a unified belief that the policy was the wisest and soundest in terms of the educational program for children.
- All levels of management could more clearly see each other's responsibilities and how all aspects of the district's operations fit together. It helped to clarify and improve the understanding of that process. It helped provide for upward, downward and lateral communications. It helped to assure the board that the best possible recommendations were being acted upon because they had been thoroughly evaluated, thought through and recommended by the manage-

ment staff, based upon their experiences and their commitment to their profession.

• First-line management knows from their firsthand experience the inequities and special circumstances that develop over the years. Allowing principals and administrators to identify these and recommend more consistent and more effective practices that result in better schools is a proper use of this important resource. The superintendent and top-level administrators have an excellent opportunity to interact and assess their own practices (Are communication lines really open? Is criticism welcome? Is it handled objectively?).

• Management had to think about their role and responsibilities in the framework of policy and help develop an overall perspective showing how individual policies, when added together, could produce an effective, well-balanced educational program.

• This type of review process can help

Policy that communicates

School boards have the authority and responsibility to establish policy, which is accomplished by following a procedure involving **study, research, testing and execution.** The policy-making process causes both the board and the administration to become very aware of day-to-day operations of the district. It is, in fact, a learning experience in role identification, because there is a great deal of interplay between the board and the staff in policy development.

Policy allows for **consistent communication** among all employes and with the community, and helps to ensure that all employes and the community understand the system. Policy communicates to the employes and the community the structure of the school district within the tax limitations of the district.

The development of policy requires much discipline — there are no easy rules to follow — by all involved in the process. Time schedules must be developed and followed, but it is meaningless to plan that the project will take a "certain number of hours." The variables are numerous, and broad averages are worth little, but the process is manageable and may not be as lengthy as first envisioned.

It must be kept in mind that policy writing is not novel writing. Policy should consist of written statements developed in a simple, clear, orderly and "people-oriented" style. Policy is used to communicate.

It is not enough to write policy that will be understood; it must be written so that it cannot be misunderstood. Unnecessary verbage makes the process more difficult, and the intent of the policy can be lost. In writing policy, here are six important points that should be kept in mind:

- Maintain clarity of content.
- Be correct and concise.
- Be direct and to the point.
- Use simplicity in format and in direction.
- Be brief, yet complete.
- Design policy for people.

Good policy communicates with people, and must be flexible, to allow for adjustment to special needs or emergencies.

The process of policy development can be as time consuming as your district wants to make it. If no one is delegated the responsibility to make it happen, it won't happen. If, however, someone is delegated this responsibility, and a planned time schedule is followed, policy will be developed and put in place.

PSBA's policy service will provide the flexibility, legal knowledge and employe relations expertise necessary to guarantee proper policy development.

PSBA will help your district accomplish its policy objective, whether it be one policy or an entire policy manual. For further information, call toll free (800) 932-0310, or write to Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Policy Service, 774 Limekiln Road, New Cumberland, PA 17070.

board members to more clearly understand the full scope, the depth, and the importance and ramifications of well-developed policy, particularly the aspects of how these policies will be accepted and implemented in terms of improving district operation.

• Finally, the process of involving the administration in recommending policy can enrich the manner in which the board sees and discharges its responsibility by demonstrating that the board is truly interested and committed to using its total resources in arriving at an overall plan for operating the public schools to serve their community in the best possible way.

A school district with good educational policies — providing for uniform enforcement, treating students, employes and the public fairly — that are really understood, supported and believed in by management, will be a better managed school district. The district should therefore produce better educational results, fewer complaints, more effective operations, greater employe satisfaction and more capable graduates.

Reprinted from ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *Vol. XLIV, No. 4, July-August 1980, by* ***Robert I. Miller,*** *Penn Hills school director.*

Policy making: An administrator's perspective on management input

School administrators view the operation of a school district as functioning properly under the guidance of a well-developed policy system. The system should be designed to provide a uniform and consistent approach toward attaining the educational and operational objectives of the school district.

In attaining these objectives, administrators look for a policy system that provides for fair, consistent and uniform treatment of all students, all parents, all employes and the public. Having a well-researched policy and enforcing it uniformly results in better understanding and acceptance of the methods of operation of the school district and the attainment of its goals.

In the search for a means of establishing sound policy, it will soon be discovered that there are a multitude of approaches rendered by various "authors" and "experts" in the field.

To begin the process, identify and determine the proper roles of the various management personnel who not only make up the management team but will be delegated the responsibility of formulating specific areas of such a policy for the board's approval. To a lay person at the outset this may seem to be a simple task, but the difficulty seems to rest with an inability to structure a process and a delegation of those duties to the appropriate management personnel in order to achieve the desired results.

The development of policy in itself is a complex matter, but it need not be if the issues are properly identified and dealt with. Within the development of a policy are such surface issues as those that involve the study of past policy, research into new and existing laws and School Code changes, evaluation, and recommendations to be placed before the board, to name a few. This process usually begins with the involvement, in many cases, of either the board itself or a selected number of the total management team. There are, however, some underlying variables that must be recognized in policy making.

One of these issues involves interactive efforts between the board and management as well as those between various management members of the organization. Another of these issues is the feeling administrators have in regard to any change that the policy may bring or mandate within the structure of the school district. This change may well affect or be contrary to their personal values, their self-realization or their job identification, and possibly the most perplexing for managers is their anticipated responses to this change.

Such underlying factors and variables possibly could exercise a greater influence on management's contribution to the policy-making process than either their ability to reason or the nature of the change itself. Thus, as administrators, if they are to truly contribute to policy making, there should be recognized an anticipation of some irrational responses to the process.

The board as well as other administrators should recognize these responses as not a display of reluctance to participate or perform assigned duties, but probably as a resistance to the anticipated resulting change that the policy will bring about.

It appears that the board, along with key management personnel, should attempt to develop a cooperative and relaxed

Administrators look for a policy system that provides for fair, consistent, uniform treatment of all students, all parents, all employes and the public.

administrative-employe relationship within the organization. Then, when such a task is undertaken, the proposed change is outlined and the consequences as they relate to the organization are exposed, and planning takes place to accommodate the change.

Finally, flexible timing in initiating and implementing the policy-making procedure can greatly reduce the resistance to change. This timing can also allow a needed period of time between the announcement of the intended policy revision and its actual initiation. Such time allowance will promote a better understanding and accommodation by the management organization and its employes. Any policy revision anticipated by the school board, if properly announced and initiated, is more likely to illicit a positive response from employes. Therefore, this indicates that resistance or reluctance to participate at any level of the organizational structure can be forestalled, and is certainly a factor that the board cannot afford to ignore.

It is generally accepted then that productive interactions in any organization depend a great deal upon the congruity of the organizational structure and the personal goals at all levels of the organization. At this point it must be determined what steps should be taken toward the intended revision and clarification of policy, and what

What characterizes good policies?

Legally based: It is essential that any policy track its cited authority accurately and completely. The Policy Guides for Pennsylvania Schools manual contains legally mandated and referenced policies based on the U.S. and Pennsylvania Constitutions, statutory law, case law, attorney general's opinions, State Board of Education regulations, Pennsylvania Department of Education and federal regulations.

Comprehensive: While it is impractical or impossible to provide policies for every conceivable situation, there should be guidelines to cover whatever might reasonably be expected in the management of most school districts. To this end, the Policy Guides for Pennsylvania Schools includes all the mandated policies designed for Pennsylvania school districts, as well as flexible model policies for areas not governed by any educational authority.

Up-to-date: Out-of-date policies are useless or even dangerous, but keeping them up-to-date demands awareness of necessary changes and a convenient method of implementing those changes. PSBA staff constantly monitor developments in the law, and draft appropriate updates which are distributed several times a year to Policy Service members.

Accessible: Board policies should be easily located and easily understood. The Policy Guides includes a cross index and table of contents for quick reference to any item. Policies are written in everyday language, avoiding excessive use of educational or legal jargon.

Practical: Policies need to be workable. Vague or very general policies will not give sufficient guidance, while too much specificity may plague the district with administrative red tape. Policies must comply with the law, yet overly legalistic and cautious policy language tends to undermine the board's right to govern the district. The board should be able to exercise its discretion while complying with the law and avoiding the risk of legal challenge. Thus, the PSBA manual is written with an eye to practicality as well as legal requirements.

Customized: The Policy Guides for Pennsylvania Schools is designed to stand on its own as a reference work. It is also designed to be modified into a "customized" board policy manual for any particular district. This localized version, in turn, can accommodate future deletions, additions and amendments while remaining a current and reliable document.

part the total management team should play in the construction of this new policy.

There is a necessity to specifically outline procedures to be followed in achieving this goal. The board, as its primary function, must duly state how they want their schools run on a daily basis, and the primary vehicle for this is the board policy manual.

A practical approach to establishment of board policy is to appoint an administrator as coordinator of the project. The coordinator would then have the responsibility of viewing the total management team and assessing what part each must play in the completion of the policy manual.

In viewing the role each administrator will have, the coordinator must have an awareness of the particular knowledge and expertise possessed by each member of the administrative team. They will then be asked to address a particular section (or sections) of the policy manual that best fits their general knowledge and background. Administrators will then be asked to formulate general guidelines within their area of operation and responsibility, which then, through the vehicle of the policy guidelines, can be presented to the board for consideration and adoption.

These four things should be considered before structuring the procedure:

- Who are the administrators to whom specific responsibilities can be assigned?
- Are positions so delineated that the individuals holding them know what is expected of them? Further, can they clearly outline their responsibilities?
- What various groupings of the administrators would be more advantageous if needed for the expedient and thorough revision of the policy manual?
- What type of organizational structure would be most effective in developing the policy manual?

Upon gathering and reviewing all available information regarding past policy of the district, the resultant material was then forwarded to PSBA, where a draft and a working copy were compiled and returned to the project coordinator.

The draft was reviewed in relation to the organizational structure of the school district. Central staff members responsible for major areas of the school district were given copies of the draft for their reaction and subsequent completion and return to the coordinator. In assigning this step to these key people, we were placing the responsibility of each identified division and subdivision with the individual most qualified to contribute to the policy manual in any given area.

A practical approach to establishment of board policy is to appoint an administrator as coordinator of the project, to view the total management team and assess what part each must play in the completion of the policy manual.

Once this was completed, the draft was submitted to PSBA for a first printing but, at this point, all management personnel had not had an opportunity for input. This was taken into consideration upon initiation of the project and would be incorporated in the second step of the process.

Upon receipt of this first draft from PSBA, the coordinator now had a document in which first-level administrators had outlined or indicated their specific thoughts of what should be incorporated in the policy manual. The coordinator now approached members of the administration within each division such as various curriculum coordinators, and so on, offering to them for their review selected areas of the policy manual with which they had more expertise and were more knowledgeable, and solicited their recommended changes. The process was completed and this draft was submitted to PSBA for a printing.

Upon receipt of the second draft from PSBA, the coordinator now approached not only first-level management and individual directors below them, which included principals, but used the total policy manual and developed subcommittees in which individuals, because of recognized strengths, were given the task of reviewing the total projected policy manual with other members of their division. As an example: two elementary principals were assigned the

Policy is the foundation of the school district and through it there can result good management, good communications and good education.

task of forming two subcommittees, each responsible to four additional elementary principals, to sit and review and offer recommendations to each section of the policy manual. This is the procedure that was followed with each division and subcommittee within the division.

Now it could be seen that all management personnel had been involved, either in their own areas of expertise or for overall reactions to the policy. Following that step, the final draft was submitted to PSBA for printing. When the final draft was received from PSBA it was presented to the first-line administrators so that they could review what was to be presented to the board. This was neither a random decision nor was it believed that the work and the policy manual by any means were complete.

A series of meetings with the board took place in which each section of the policy manual was discussed by the board with those administrators involved with the specific responsibilties of carrying out that particular section of the policy manual. This process allowed the board to review recommendations and seek further clarification on any matter within that section from the particular administrator or administrators who had recommended, and were responsible for interpreting, the policy.

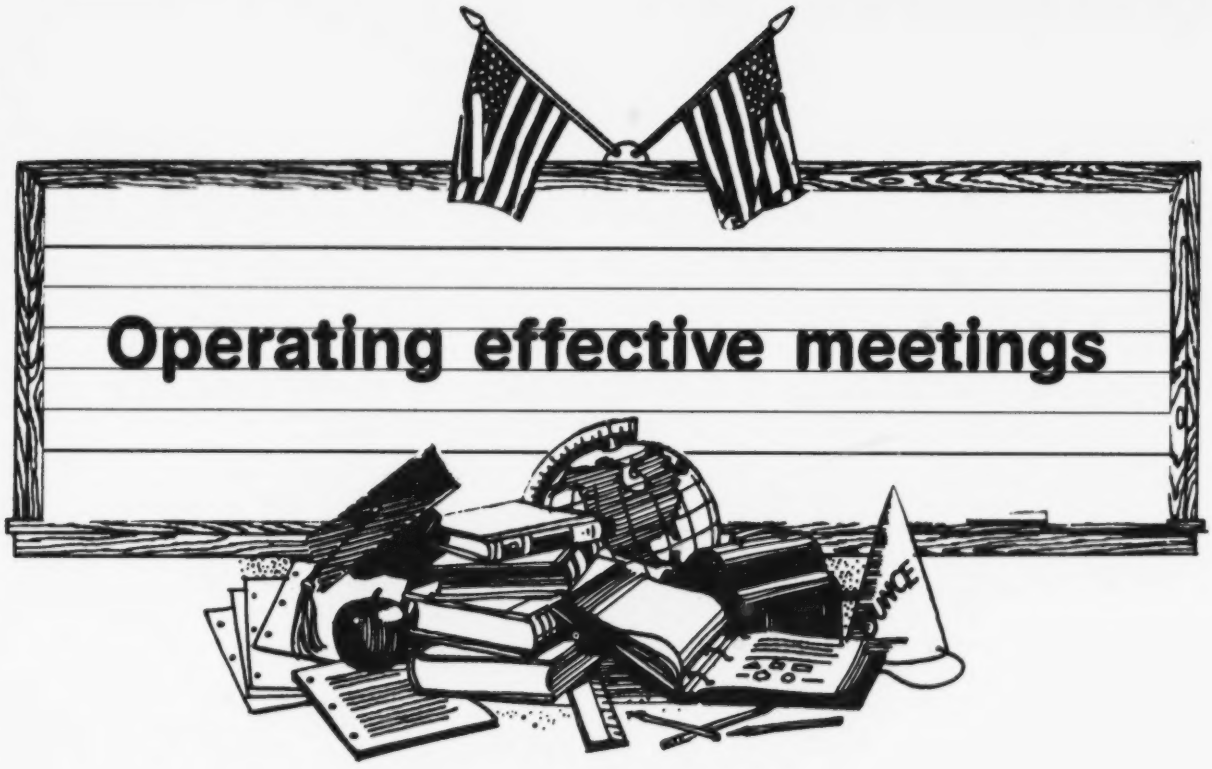
At each of these meetings any suggested changes between the board and administration were so noted, and upon completion of these meetings not only were the administrators well versed in the various areas of the policy, but so were the board members. Then the final draft was printed by PSBA and returned to the school district for formal adoption by the board.

It should be kept in mind that policy is the foundation of the school district and through it there can result good management, good communications, and good education.

- The highest priority within a school district so far as management is concerned is the development and implementation of policy to give direction to the school district.
- It is the responsibility of the school board to establish policy.
- The board should involve the total administrative staff in the development of policy.
- The organizational structure, which includes administrators, should willingly contribute their concerted efforts toward this task.
- The policy itself should be a product of those most expert in each of the areas, and should cover every major aspect of the running of the school district.
- Policy should be reviewed and updated regularly.
- Policy must be made readily available to all who are expected to interpret it for the school district.
- The policy should always reflect the intentions, the needs and the directions that the school district will undertake, assuring a sound and functional educational program for the community.

Reprinted from ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *July-August 1980, by* ***Dr. Carmen Provenzo,*** *dean of instruction, Penn Hills School District.*

CHAPTER 3



Operating effective meetings

43 Guidelines to effective parliamentary procedure

51 How school boards operate effective meetings

57 Operating effectively in the sunshine

63 Board meetings: Tips for success

65 Board meetings don't have to be battlegrounds

Guidelines to effective parliamentary procedure

Parliamentary procedure is not the same as Robert's Rules of Order. It can be, but doesn't have to be. And for local governmental officials, including school board members, it probably should not be.

That advice comes from at least three experts in the field of parliamentary procedure: Floyd N. Riddick, parliamentarian emeritus of the United States Senate; Leo Athans, a Washington, D.C., attorney; and Robert Leiman, co-founder of the American Institute of Certified Parliamentarians.

The warning against wholesale adoption of Robert's Rules is particularly important to school boards which are frequently targets of litigation.

The main problem seems to be that very few people, including board members, **fully** understand Robert's Rules and how to use them. Consequently, the improper use of Robert's Rules is being used against boards with the result that resolutions, policies and contracts are being declared null and void.

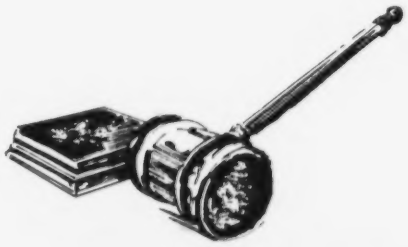
Robert's Rules has become a brand name. Few people say they photocopy papers, apply adhesive bandages, or eat gelatin desserts. Instead, they Xerox, use Band Aids, or eat Jello.

Similarly, few people say they have a "form of parliamentary procedure." They almost always formally adopt Robert's Rules of Order. However, the rules are very rarely understood by the chairman or president of any organization, much less the other members. Generally the rules will be invoked by one or more members in emotional and controversial proceedings culminating in a close vote. For example, under Robert's Rules can motions that have been tabled, reconsidered, voted down, postponed indefinitely, or referred to committee be legally reconsidered at the same meeting?

Who really knows? And unless you vote to suspend the rules, will the majority who prevails for the evening on that controversial, emotional issue do so in violation of Robert's Rules? Anybody, especially an attorney hired to find legal loopholes, can quickly determine through a reading of the minutes and some quick research into Robert's Rules, whether procedural violations occurred. Such violations can form the basis of a successful challenge to the actions of locally elected officials.

Thomas Jefferson wrote the first book on American parliamentary procedure in 1801. He wrote it specifically to assist public officials at the local and state levels. His book was adopted by Congress, which modified its original teachings. The U.S. Senate, which takes parliamentary procedure seriously enough to have a full-time parliamentarian, traces its roots to Jefferson and not to Henry Martin Robert, who first published his rules of order in 1876.

Robert was a general in the U.S. Army who modified the rules that governed the



46

Frequency, freshness and time limitation rules are points of order that school directors should consciously consider.

English House of Lords and House of Commons. He did so to "meet the needs of ordinary society," not American governmental entities. Therefore, Robert's Rules are an outgrowth of parliamentary procedure developed in the British Parliament over hundreds of years.

None of the foregoing is intended to denigrate Robert's Rules. Any student of parliamentary procedure knows Robert's Rules are extremely logical and well-structured. Therein lies the problem for the average school director and other local officials. Robert's Rules are so structured, so refined, that it takes more than 200 pages to explain which set of motions have precedence over others, which are debatable, which the chair must recognize, and other technical procedures.

School officials have too much to learn and too much to do to have time to take a two-credit course, plus a lab, in Robert's Rules. But they can learn the basics about parliamentary procedure in a few minutes time in a manner that will be both fair and efficient.

Fairness and efficiency

Robert's Rules do not always promote fairness and efficiency. Take for example, this observation by O. Garfield Jones in his excellent booklet, *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance.*

"According to Robert's Rules, the motion to consider and have entered on the minutes for action at the next meeting takes precedence over the regular motion to reconsider and thus enables two obstreperous members to prevent final action on any motion at one meeting no matter how important.

"General Robert recognized this difficulty, but suggested that this paralysis of action by two members may be overcome by having the club vote to have a special meeting the next day at which time a special motion to reconsider may be voted down and the main motion to which it applied be put into effect.

"But how many organizations are in a position to call a special meeting the next day to remove the barrier to final action set up by two contrary members who have paralyzed immediate action by the assembly on a matter of urgent importance to which these two contrary members happened to be opposed? It is my contention that there is less probability of abuse on the regular motion to reconsider by the majority than there is probability of the abuse of the motion to reconsider and have entered on the minutes for action at the next meeting by any two members of the assembly."

The problems this could cause Pennsylvania school boards, given the requirements of the state's Sunshine Law in rescheduling a special meeting, are obvious.

Fairness and efficiency are the twin precepts that prompted Robert to develop his rules more than 100 years ago. According to Riddick, in his introduction to Rachael Vixman's paperback, *Robert's Rules of Order,* the rules "soon became a handbook for organizations, clubs and schools all over the land. In a constructive way, it exposed the uselessness of attending meetings which began late and dragged on. It gave enlightenment and comfort to frustrated members who, without knowledge, were easily victimized by overbearing chairmen and ruthless small cliques. And it armed the general membership with the know-how to combat those seeking to push through controversial resolutions without proper consideration.

Understanding how cumbersome Robert's Rules can be in legitimate debate, Riddick went on to say "Robert's Rules of Order provides a group guide to democratic action. But it also imposes a great responsibility on individuals to understand and master the democratic procedures so painstakingly provided." That was written in 1967. Riddick had not changed his mind 15 years later as he cautioned elected officials of the pitfalls if they fail to "master the democratic procedures so painstakingly provided."

Riddick's sentiments were echoed by Robert Lieman, who frequently lectures on parliamentary procedure. He makes a delightful humorous presentation entitled "Parliamentary Horse Sense" which gently ridicules Robert's Rules and its slavish adherence to complicated procedures.

Amplifying the possible adverse legal consequences of botched motions, Athans mentioned instances where rezoning plans, town ordinances, and other municipal resolutions, have been successfully challenged because of improper parliamentary procedure based upon Robert's Rules. The results, at the very least, are costly and often embarrassing.

Municipalities are often required to readvertise meetings and agendas before their actions will have the weight of law. In the meantime, the municipality usually suffers lost income and incurs unnecessary legal expenses. How do the Pennsylvania Dutch say it? "How come I never have time to do it right the first time, but always have time to do it a second time?"

Given the problem, are there viable so-

lutions? Yes. The School Code (Section 510) says, in part, "The board of school directors in any school district may adopt and enforce such reasonable rules and regulations as it may deem necessary and proper, regarding the management of its school affairs . . ."

PSBA's Policy Guide Service, to which nearly 80% of all districts subscribe, clearly outlines these two alternatives as it suggests that the district may adopt Robert's Rules or use its own. A significant number of districts use portions of Robert's Rules and then develop their version of "reasonable rules and regulations."

The 10 Helpful Hints, and 20 Motions, are an attempt to provide a simple, workable framework for understanding how a meeting might best operate from both a broad (almost philosophical) standpoint and from a more narrow procedural standpoint.

A board president must exercise discretion as to when the reins are to be relaxed and when they are to be pulled tight to prevent situations from running out of control.

No district should adopt these suggestions wholesale, any more than it should completely adopt Robert's Rules, without examining them in detail. It is fully expected that these suggestions will be modified to suit local needs, customs and styles.

The helpful hints are an attempt to isolate the key aspects of a meeting, which are part of the fair and efficient process, and which are very rarely addressed in the context of Robert's Rules.

10 Helpful Hints

1 Getting on the agenda

The agenda constitutes the "orders of the day" and the suggestion in Motion No. 1 is that no item may be added to the agenda for discussion and/or action without the consent of two-thirds of the total membership (see chart p. 46).

Some guides to parliamentary procedure suggest that agendas are not amendable at all and that the chairman need not recognize a motion to amend. That may be appropriate for large annual conventions where thousands of people are in attendance and each person has a vote. It is not, however, recommended for the fair and efficient operation of a school district where the board must, by law, approve certain actions.

Even Robert's Rules (Section 48) says distinction should be made between large annual meetings and meetings of small boards. (See box, p. 49.)

Experience suggests that occasionally an action item may inadvertently have been omitted from the agenda or may have been submitted a day or two after the deadline for submission of agenda items. So some flexibility to amend seems desirable. Yet a "set" agenda, not easily amendable, serves the very practical effect of legally preventing members of the audience from getting on the agenda with last minute items that are all too frequently personal of political in nature or would otherwise disturb the legal responsibilities of the board.

2 Old and new business

If the agenda contains standard "old business" and "new business" categories without items specifically being listed under each, there might as well be no attempt to have a set agenda. There are those who insist and those who resist the "old business" and the "new business" portion of the agenda without definition.

Those who insist invoke freedom of speech privileges. Those who resist say it encourages last minute surprises and assists those individual board members who are "hip shooters," who are continually unprepared, who favor extemporaneous speeches fraught with political posturing and personal preening. Generally the "insisters" are those people who literally have their own agendas.

Quite often a local school board fails to

20 motions most frequently encountered at school board meetings in Pennsylvania

No district should adopt these suggested 20 motions wholesale, any more than it should completely adopt Robert's Rules, without examining them in detail. It is fully expected that these suggestions will be modified to suit local needs, customs and styles.

	Requires Recognition from the Chair	Is the Issue Debatable?	Is the Motion Amendable?	Does the Motion Need a Second?	Type of Vote Required
1. A Motion to Amend the Agenda	No	No	No	No	6 *
2. Point of Order to Question Procedure	No	No	No	No	None
**3. A Motion to Appeal the Decision of the Chair (or Point of Order)	No	No	No	Yes	Maj/Present
4. A Motion for a "Division of the House" (i.e. Asking for a Hand Vote or a Roll-call Vote)	No	No	No	No	None
5. Motion to Adjourn	Yes	No	No	Yes	Maj/Voting
6. Motion for a Recess	Yes	No	No	Yes	Maj/Present
7. Question of Privilege (Which Requires an Immediate Answer)	No	No	No	No	None
8. A Motion to Call the Question (Which ends all Debate)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Maj/Present
9. Motion to Limit or Extend the Date	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maj/Present
10. A Motion to Postpone to a Time Later in the Same Meeting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj/Voting
11. A Motion to Postpone to the Next Meeting	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Maj/Present
12. Motion to Refer to the Committee for Further Investigation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj/Voting
13. Motion to Amend or Modify a Motion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj/Present
14. Motion to Return to the Main Motion on the Floor for Discussion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj/Present
15. Call for a Division of the Question for Purposes of Discussion	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Maj/Voting
16. Call a Motion for a Division of the Question for Purposes of Voting	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maj/Voting
17. Motion to Reconsider a Question Previously Postponed to Later in the Meeting or Previously Postponed to the Next Meeting	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Maj/Present
18. Motion to Offer a Substitute Motion to a Pending Motion	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Maj/Present
19. Motion for Permission to Withdraw a Motion	No	No	No	No	Maj/Present
20. Motion to Suspend the Rules	Yes	No	No	Yes	6 *

* All votes are predicated on a nine-member board. The number six is the number of affirmative votes which are required regardless of whether there are vacant positions on the board. Members who abstain, in essence, acquiesce to the eventual majority vote. For example, with seven people present, if four abstain, a procedural motion (except #1 and #20) can carry 2-1.

** Whether the decision of the chair was accurate should be determinable by reference to a chart such as this. If the point of order is not covered by the adopted rules, a majority vote of those present can be used to resolve the issue.

consciously consider these diametrically opposed styles. If the board members and superintendent all trust each other, a well-defined "set" agenda seems to be the preferred style. Where school directors (and superintendent) are split into two, three, four and sometimes even 10 different factions, the only thing they may agree upon is an open agenda.

Such an agenda guarantees each a chance to launch potentially embarrassing "trial balloons," engage in character assassination by innuendo, or ask detailed questions to which there are no immediate or easy answers. These questions are often asked in the accusatory manner, suggesting to the public that the person being questioned is incompetent or hiding something. This violates a well-established principle of good boardmanship: "There shall be no surprises." This principle, and many others, are stated clearly in PSBA's 1977 award-winning booklet, *Board Superintendent Relationships.*

One negative aspect of a highly structured agenda is the possibility that the public will perceive that the board is not being open and honest. The two, however, are not and should not be mutually exclusive. This is especially true if there are established procedures which permit any resident or member of the educational community to address the board and request action by the board. Such procedures should also permit board members to express their opinions on each topic on the agenda.

There has to be a balance struck between being open and honest, and being highly efficient, in the sense that the meeting will progress on a reasonable time schedule. Mussolini made railroads run on time, but only by dispensing with fairness.

3 Discussion

Most procedural rules require a motion and a second before any discussion can occur. When school boards ignore this rule they tend to stray from the topic. A wise board president will generally know when to tighten the reins if the discussion starts to wander too far from the topic. Requiring a formal motion and a second helps focus on the narrow issue of the moment.

4 Type of meeting

It should be noted that these comments on how a discussion should or shouldn't be controlled can vary greatly between committee meetings and committee of the whole meetings, and between open meetings and executive sessions.

Generally speaking, the more informal the meeting and the fewer members present (including the audience), the less formal are the rules. Committee meetings very rarely deal in motions and seconds before starting discussion.

The results of these committee meetings often lead to the structuring of the formal agenda. How an item is phrased on the agenda, and whether the board adopts the formality of requiring a seconded motion prior to discussion, can offer certain "controls" to a meeting.

For example, a request might have been made by a teacher for sabbatical leave. The superintendent is obligated to submit such a request to the board for action. In reporting this item to the board, the superintendent might recommend that the board not grant the request because: (1) it was not timely filed; (2) the teacher's travel itinerary is extremely vague; and (3) having conferred with the teacher, the superintendent has se-

Traits of a good presiding officer

1. Keeps a meeting moving in an orderly fashion.
2. Remains calm and self-possessed at all times.
3. Recognizes members to be heard in a fair and impartial manner.
4. Allows both sides of a question to be heard.
5. Keeps the attention of the board on one matter at a time.
6. Knows the basics of parliamentary procedure and refers to rules of order when necessary.
7. Allows for visitors' comments that are appropriate to the business at hand, but controls such comments so that they do not destroy the purpose of the meeting.

rious doubts that the planned trip has any appreciable educational value.

If the board has adopted Robert's Rules of Order requiring a seconded motion before discussion, and the motion is in the affirmative to grant the sabbatical, the motion could die for lack of a second and no discussion could take place.

Conversely, if the item is phrased in the negative to deny the sabbatical, upon a motion to deny being seconded, discussion is permissible.

Without a rule requiring a motion and a second before discussion at a sunshine meeting, individual board members can be assured that they may be able to discuss any issue, including those for which it is known there is virtually no support whatsoever.

5 Frequency, freshness and time limitations

While some management styles encourage debate by not requiring a formal motion and second, almost all boards have some rule which fixes the time for debate and a mechanism whereby discussion can be limited, foreclosed or expanded. (See nos. 8, 9 and 10 in the 20 Motions chart, p. 46.)

As an illustration, a board may decide that at a sunshine meeting, no member may speak to an issue more than two times (frequency), unless a new subissue emerges (freshness). Obviously, whether a topic under discussion is to be classified as part of the original issue, or a new subissue, is a matter of discretion by the chair.

For example, limitations may permit each board member a maximum of five minutes on the first round of comments and opinions, and may limit subsequent comments to no more than three minutes. A tougher item to control, if control is ever desirable, is an attempt to limit "legitimate questions" (as opposed to discussion which often involves expressions of favor or disfavor based on instinct and/or informed judgment).

Such "legitimate questions" can be stated in a matter of seconds and do not constitute opinion or debate. In the field of human dynamics, any attempt to structure rules which would purport to apply to every situation is doomed to failure. This, perhaps, is the Achilles' heel of Robert's Rules which threatens to crush and overwhelm people because they are so "painstakingly" structured.

A board president, like an experienced equestrian, must hold the reins at all times, but must exercise discretion as to when the reins are to be relaxed and when they are to be pulled tight to prevent situations from running out of control. Frequency, freshness and time limitation rules are points of order that school directors should consciously consider.

6 Priority of motions: 'four whiches and a when'

The answers under Robert's Rules to the following questions have all been defined and refined over the last century. The simple charts on page 46 and page 54 may also help answer:

- **Which** questions or motions from fellow board members are debatable and which are not?
- **Which** motions are amendable and which are not?
- **Which** motions need a second and which do not?
- **Which** votes need five affirmative votes, or simply a majority vote of those voting?
- **When** must the president recognize a speaker with a motion, question, objection or point of order?

With the exception of "which votes," where required votes on certain substantive issues are specified in the School Code (especially Section 508), everything else is discretionary.

The chart on page 46 illustrates the motions, objections and requests that board presidents are most likely to encounter. If the board is looking for a substitute for Robert's Rules, it may want to consider adopting one chart or the other. But first the charts should be given serious consideration by the board and modified to suit local needs, practices, preferences and customs.

7 Vote to suspend all rules

Parliamentary procedure should include a method to allow for suspension of the

rules. This is a motion that serves as an escape valve for emergency situations or for when a board finds itself unable to master its own democratic procedures. Because it is generally viewed as a drastic measure, most parliamentary procedure books suggest a board may want to require six affirmative votes (two-thirds majority).

8 Recognition: 'verbal' vs. 'raising a hand'

The chart on page 46 includes several motions, requests or objections that because they require no vote (nos. 2, 4 and 7) ultimately have priority over whatever else may be occurring at the meeting. But what of the other 17 motions? Does your procedure allow for the motion, request or objection to be verbal or "shouted out" rather than having the person be recognized by the chair?

As a matter of practicality, it is difficult to ignore something that has been voiced aloud and out of turn at a meeting. Since it is impossible to "unring the bell," so to speak, the chair might "recognize" such improper behavior by commenting that the speaker has been "crude, rude, unrefined and out of order," or all of the above. Assuming the chair does not indulge in games whereby a sudden bout of astigmatism prevents seeing a raised hand, everyone should be called upon in turn.

What happens if a member of the board constantly ignores procedural rules and is constantly talking out of turn more frequently than permitted? Some boards have solved this problem by providing for methods whereby a member can be ruled out of order or censured.

Others take the position that it is perfectly appropriate to shout out motions to adjourn, to limit debate, to table, etc., because to wait one's turn allows the meeting or the discussion to go on, perhaps needlessly if the majority is predisposed to vote to adjourn, limit debate or table. Again, this is a matter of style, but whatever way a board proceeds, style can be stated as a matter of policy. The chart on page 46 provides answers to some of these issues regarding when the chair needs to recognize.

9 Type of vote, order of vote, number of votes

The type of vote, as well as the number of votes, is often fixed by law, such as the requirement to have an affirmative vote of five or more members by roll call. Some votes require a two-thirds majority of the members of the board under the School Code. (See box p. 52.)

Another section (315), dealing with replacing vacancies of the board, requires a "majority vote of the remaining members of the board." Yet only a majority vote of the quorum (five members) of the board is necessary to elect a secretary. (In a 1956

Procedures in small boards

In a board meeting where there are not more than about a dozen members present, some of the formality that is necessary in a large assembly would hinder business. The rules governing such meetings are different from the rules that hold in assemblies, in the following respects.

- Members are not required to obtain the floor before making motions or speaking, which they can do while seated.
- Motions need not be seconded.
- There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a question, and motions to close or limit debate generally should not be entertained.
- Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
- Sometimes, when a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced. Unless agreed to by general consent, however, all proposed actions of a board must be approved by vote under the same rules as in an assembly, except that a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands, which is often a better method in such meetings.
- The chairman need not rise while putting questions to vote.
- The chairman can speak in discussion without rising or leaving the chair; and, subject to rule or custom within the particular board (which should be uniformly followed regardless of how many members are present), he usually can make motions and usually votes on all questions.

Excerpted from ***Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised,*** *© 1970, Library of Congress, Catalog Card # 71-106451.*

Dauphin County Court decision two of five members present abstained, only three members voted and the secretary was elected by a 2-1 vote.)

Although you can vote for yourself as secretary or treasurer in a third or fourth class district (even though the candidate in the Dauphin County case chose not to), you cannot vote to set your own compensation.

Many boards have no prescribed way to call the names on an issue, leaving the process to the discretion of the president. Others do it by alphabetical order, by seniority or inverse seniority, or in the order people are seated. Some boards do it by a "rotating list" where the first called last time is moved to the bottom and then moves back up the list. Some do it by written (but not secret) ballots; some by the simultaneous raising of hands — right, for and left, against.

Some of these techniques lend to "stacking the deck" so to speak. Some lend themselves more to a "neutral" vote-taking procedure, whereby a board president has less opportunity to manipulate the results by calling his vote first or last, for instance. (Incidentally, unlike Robert's Rules, where the chair votes only in the case of a tie, the school board president under Pennsylvania law has an equal vote.)

Many boards use a technique where the president states, "You will all be recorded as voting in favor of this motion unless I hear an objection or an abstention." This might be used for matters which the president expects will result in an unanimous vote. The advantage under Pennsylvania law is that there is virtually no risk of missing a roll-call vote required by the School Code when the motion is phrased in this manner.

Opponents of this method complain that the procedure intimidates those who are thinking of voting "no" and if the vote is taken quickly, it precludes the few extra moments of deliberation or suspense that a more traditional roll-call procedure entails.

10 Adjourning a meeting

As innocuous as a motion to adjourn probably is 99% of the time, it has the potential effect of precluding items not yet reached on the agenda. Such items, if not acted upon, may require a separate so-called "special meeting" of the board. It is often difficult to arrange a convenient time for such a subsequent sunshine meeting. In addition, there are other provisions of the Sunshine Law that must be followed to properly schedule a "special meeting," as that term is statutorily defined.

Remember that this article and its accompanying charts are merely guidelines and suggestions. There is no substitute for the four key ingredients to successful meetings: (1) an established set of mutually adopted rules and procedures; (2) a competent school board president; (3) a thoughtfully prepared agenda; and (4) mutual trust, respect, honesty and adherence to democratic principles among the members of the governing body.

As has often been stated: School board meetings are the "moment of truth" for students and public education. Such board responsibilities call for leadership and statesmanship in the highest order.

Updated in 1987 from an article in the September-October 1982 ***PSBA Bulletin*** *by* ***Donald B. Owen Esq.,*** *PSBA inservice education director.*

How school boards operate effective meetings

How school boards conduct their business and their meetings has been referred to as the closest thing to Athens in action in America.

No two meetings are ever alike. How a meeting is conducted is largely a matter of style, personalities and group dynamics. Variables include the type of meeting, the type of audience, a board's procedural rules, how an agenda is structured and what is on the agenda.

Who prepares the agenda? In many districts, a working draft is prepared by the superintendent, the board secretary and the board president. It will often include subcommittee reports and items requested by the public, as well as recurring responsibilities the board has to attend to. Next, the entire board as a so-called committee of the whole, at a public meeting, shapes the agenda's eventual form.

It is often obvious in discussion at a public meeting how an issue will be resolved, but official action (voting) occurs only at a sunshine meeting. A 1987 Pennsylvania School Boards Association survey found that almost 60% of all boards hold public meetings where they choose only to deliberate and not vote.

According to a 1983 survey conducted by PSBA, 91% of the districts have administrators routinely attend all or part of board meetings on a need-to-know basis.

Committee-of-the-whole sessions are sometimes criticized for being too lengthy and too time consuming. Yet many boards feel it is extremely important that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in every aspect of board business.

Some districts rely heavily on standing subcommittees and applaud them as a much more efficient way to do business. Critics of standing subcommittees complain they lead to separate feifdoms and encourage "logrolling."

Whereas the 1983 and 1987 surveys suggest a 10% reduction in the number of standing committees per district, the percentage of districts using subcommittees (80%) remained constant. Committee meetings are used to explore issues to help build an agenda prior to the committee-of-the-whole meeting, which is where the entire board defines, refines, debates and votes on the issues.

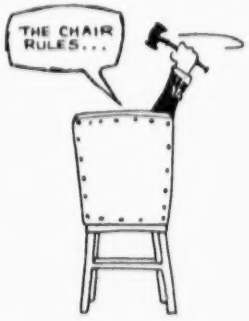
Ideal meeting

The model meeting should proceed **efficiently and democratically.** Disagreement is an inevitable byproduct of the democratic process and disagreement can thwart efficiency. Disagreement can quickly become demoralizing and debilitating. Avoiding, or at least minimizing, the negative aspects of democratic debate is not easily accomplished, but a good set of rules can help immensely.

A board should agree on a set of rules (within the confines of law), follow that set of rules and maturely accept the proposition that the majority rules and that the minority should not seek to sabotage or obstruct. Or, as a board member once said, "We agree we have the right to disagree, but we also agree not to be disagreeable afterward."

Each board member should be issue-oriented and not vote strictly along political lines. Each board member should vote his or her conscience, after issues have been adequately explained, researched and discussed.

Ideally, all decisions should be made in the interest of the entire district, with the



How a meeting is conducted is largely a matter of style, personalities and group dynamics.

students' best interests in mind, without regard for the personal interests of an individual board member, his or her own family, or some special interest group to whom the board member might feel beholden.

Board members have the responsibility of asking the tough, probing questions to enable each member to cast an informed, intelligent vote. Whether an agenda item is initiated by the superintendent or is an item a majority of the board has directed the superintendent to "investigate and recommend," **each member** should be equally vigorous in pursuing his or her viewpoint and vigilant in protecting his or her freedom of speech within the law and according to parliamentary procedure. Boards should not be rubber stamps of the administration, nor should individual board members be obstructors of the agenda, purposefully ambushing and embarrassing others with their own hidden agendas.

Rules of the game

There should be no surprises at a public board meeting.

Fairness and consistency are two of the most important trademarks of an efficient and democratic board. If, by analogy, boardmanship is viewed as a game, it is important to understand the rules of the game and to participate accordingly.

In any game, good sportsmanship is revered; it commands respect. Players who do not understand the rules or do not play by the rules are not well respected. The same is true in boardmanship.

Section 407 of the School Code states, "Each board or school director may adopt **reasonable rules** or regulations for its government and control." (emphasis added) In other words, **it is not necessary for a board to adopt Robert's Rule of Order,** although most boards have adopted them.

Five and six-vote lists

Under the School Code, the following items required **five votes,** regardless of absences and abstentions: (Section 508)

1. Fixing the length of the school term.
2. Adopting textbooks.
3. Appointing or dismissing district superintendents, assistant district superintendents, associate superintendents, principals and teachers.
4. Appointing tax collectors and other appointees.
5. Adopting the annual budget.
6. Levying and assessing taxes.
7. Purchasing, selling or condemning land.
8. Locating new buildings or changing the locations of old ones.
9. Dismissing a teacher after a hearing.
10. Creating or increasing any indebtedness.
11. Adopting courses of study.
12. Establishing additional schools or departments.
13. Designating depositories for school funds.
14. Entering into contracts of any kind, including contracts for the purchase of fuel or any supplies, where the amount involved exceeds $100.
15. Fixing salaries or compensation of officers, teachers or other appointees of the board of school directors.
16. Entering into contracts with or the making of appropriations to the intermediate unit for the district's proportionate share of the cost of services provided by the intermediate unit.

A **two-thirds majority (six votes)** of the members of the board is required, under the School Code, for the following items:

1. Dismissal of employes (1129).
2. Borrowing in anticipation of current revenues (640).
3. Temporary loans (687(c)).
4. Selling or giving land to the community college (707(11)).
5. Dealing with temporary debts (634).
6. Overriding a superintendent's recommendation regarding textbook selection (803).
7. Budget transfers during the last nine months of a fiscal year (609 and 687(d)). (Be sure to read the Greencastle-Antrim School District case, *School Law Information Exchange*, Vol. XV, No. 119, 1978, in conjunction with this requirement.)

Robert's Rules are complicated and were not designed for local government agencies such as school districts. As an alternative, many boards have adopted a set of simpler, more manageable rules, such as those which appear on page 54 or those from *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance* by O. Garfield Jones, available through PSBA.

Getting on the agenda

How can a member of the public get information, action and answers from its school board?

First of all, lots of answers and information can be obtained by talking to board members informally. Frequently such requests will be redirected to the appropriate school district employe because many issues are covered by existing policy, rules and regulations.

Secondly, virtually all districts have a policy that allows a citizen to address the board by submitting a written request to place an item on the agenda, if answers received are not satisfactory, or if board action or a change of policy is being requested.

Similarly, virtually all districts permit public comment. Most allow citizen input and questions **prior to** the time when motions, discussion among board members and voting begin. A few allow input and questions, issue-by-issue. Most boards have policy which reasonably limits public comment to prevent it from becoming a forum for public debate to the point where the board cannot transact business. If public debate escalates to the point where order cannot be maintained, the board may adjourn or recess.

The public should realize that being able to get on the agenda and being able to make public comments is **a privilege, not a right.** This point was well explained by a 1983 Pennsylvania Superior Court decision which held:

> . . . an individual has no "right" to speak at public municipal meetings any more than he has a right to address the state legislature or Congress while they are in session. **According to custom and practice, most local governments afford individuals the opportunity to address the local government bodies but such practice is not required** and local governments surely have the right to establish and enforce rules and regulations governing individuals' conduct at public municipal meetings. Furthermore, there is no requirement that any individual attending a public meeting be given unlimited time to address the body on real or imagined evils or on any other matter. **To rule otherwise would be to permit any person to destroy the effectiveness of a local government** by monopolizing its time at public meetings where its business must be conducted. (emphasis added)

Voting procedures

A typical agenda (see p. 55) includes the usual preliminaries of taking roll, approving previous minutes, receiving the treasurer's report and hearing what members of the community have to say concerning issues on the agenda before the board begins to take care of business. Business starts when an agenda item receives a motion and a second.

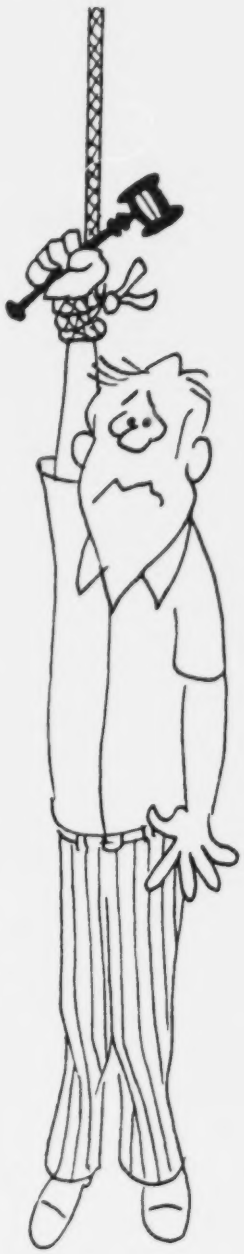
Generally speaking, to pass, a duly seconded motion requires five affirmative votes, six affirmative votes or something substantially less. Each board may establish whether an action not specifically requiring five or six affirmative votes under the School Code needs a majority of those present, a majority of the votes cast (not counting abstentions) or a minimum of five affirmative votes (even if not required by the School Code).

Section 508 of the School Code requires the affirmative vote of the majority of all members of the board of school directors to be duly recorded, showing how each member voted, in order to take action on specific subjects.

Any item not covered by the "five-vote" or "six-vote" lists — and there are many — requires only a majority of those present and voting, unless board policy provides otherwise. For example, at a school board meeting with only a quorum (five members present), the court upheld a 2-1 vote to elect a board secretary when the candidate herself and another board member both abstained.

Therefore it becomes clear that those who abstain acquiesce to the eventual ma-

Don't get hung up on parliamentary procedure.



Quick reference and guide to parliamentary procedures for districts who have adopted Robert's Rules

	ORDER OF MOTIONS	MAY APPLY TO FOLLOWING MOTIONS	May Interrupt One Who Has Floor	Mover Must Be Recognized	REQUIRES A SECOND	DEBATABLE	VOTE REQUIRED	MAY BE RENEWED	MOTIONS THAT MAY APPLY TO IT
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS	1. TO FIX TIME OF NEXT MEETING	None	No	Yes	Yes	Not when privileged	Majority	Not for same time	Amend, Reconsider
	2. TO ADJOURN	None	No	Yes	Yes	Not when privileged	Majority	Yes, after progress	None
	3. QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE	None	Yes, if Necessary	No	No	No, but a resulting motion is	Decided by chair	After progress	None apply to question of privilege, but all may apply to resulting privileged motion
	4. TO CALL FOR ORDERS OF THE DAY	Any special or general order	Yes, to call for a special order	No	No	No	None – takes 2/3 vote to postpone special order	Yes, except special cases	None except to postpone orders
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS	5. RISE TO A POINT OF ORDER	Any motion or act	Yes	No	No	No	None unless appealed, then majority	No	None
	6. APPEAL	Any decision by the chair	Yes	No	Yes	No	Majority	No	Lay on table, close debate, reconsider
	7. TO SUSPEND THE RULES	Any motion where needed	No	Yes	Yes	No	Usually 2/3 (see Constitution)	No, except by unanimous consent	None
	8. TO CREATE SPECIAL ORDERS	Main motion	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3	After progress	All
	9. TO WITHDRAW (or renew) A MOTION	Any motion	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	After progress	Reconsider
	10. VOTING – "Division" Motion To Ballot	Any		No	Division, no; Ballot, yes	No	Majority	Does not apply	None
	11. OBJECTION TO CONSIDERATION	Main question and questions of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	2/3 in negative	No	Reconsider
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS	12A. TO LAY ON THE TABLE	Main question, appeals, questions of privilege or reconsider	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	After progress	None
	12B TO TAKE FROM THE TABLE	Only to motion that was tabled	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	After progress	None
	13. CLOSE DEBATE	Any debatable motion	No	Yes	Yes	No	2/3 Majority	After progress	Reconsider
	14. TO POSTPONE TO CERTAIN DAY	Main motion, questions of privilege or reconsider	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	After progress	Amend, reconsider, limit or close debate
	15. TO REFER	Main motion, questions of privilege	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	After progress	Amend, reconsider limit or close debate
	16. TO AMEND OR SUBSTITUTE	Main motion, limit debate, refer, postpone definitely, fix time of next meeting	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	No	Amend, reconsider, limit or close debate
	17. TO POSTPONE INDEFINITELY	Main motion, questions of privilege	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	No	Limit or close debate, reconsider ("I" vote only)
	18. MAIN QUESTION (or motion)	No other motion	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Not at same session	All
	19. TO RECONSIDER	Any motion except adjourn, suspend rules, lay on table	Yes, for entry	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	No	Limit or close debate, lay on table, postpone definitely
	20. TO RESCIND	Main motions, appeals, questions of privilege	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Not at same session	All
	21. ELECTIONS (Nominations)	None	No	Yes	No	No			None

jority. Is there any penalty for abstaining? Apparently not. In the only known case of its kind, a federal District Court in 1983 struck down a Madison, Wisconsin, ordinance that prohibited council members from abstaining. The judge said the ordinance violated the First Amendment, freedom of speech.

Under the ordinance, any member was subject to censure by council for abstaining, and a second censure could result in a fine. An abstaining member sought an injunction, saying her right of free speech had been violated, after she abstained on an issue that eventually passed by an overwhelming vote.

The city argued that the ordinance was legal as an exercise of the council's power to determine its own procedural rules. The court rejected this argument, finding that the city would probably be unable to show a sufficiently compelling government interest to sidestep the First Amendment. The court noted that representatives who consistently dodge issues by not voting are hurting their constituents, saying, "In our government system, the proper remedy for such behavior lies with the electorate."

After each issue is explained and alternatives explored, a vote is taken. How are votes taken when a roll call vote is required, requested or desired? There are many choices. Most boards prefer a rotating basis. Some always have the president voting last. Some vote alphabetically; some by seniority or inverse seniority; some by written, but not secret, ballot since all votes by law and/or policy must be recorded.

As the meeting progresses, you will invariably notice that the board president as "the chair" will exert significant influence on the tone of the meeting. Yet the other eight board members and the superintendent can be, and frequently are, equally significant forces, because each board member has an equal vote. (The superintendent as a nonvoting, ex-officio member of the board, is entitled by law to attend all meetings.)

Many boards have a deadline for items to be placed on the agenda. Obviously, some flexibility must be exercised if someone has an urgent, unexpected item. Strict adherence to a deadline can cause more problems than the rule seeks to prevent as it might deny the public, the staff or board members the opportunity to raise a truly

Fairness and consistency are two of the most important trademarks of an efficient, democratic board.

Board agenda

What does a typical board agenda look like? There is no one "right" pattern, but there are nevertheless certain essential items on almost any agenda. Some items to include:

1. Roll call and recording of those present.
2. Recognize visitors and entertain questions from the floor regarding items on the agenda.
3. Approval of minutes of the previous meeting.
4. Announce any executive sessions of the board that have occurred since the last sunshine meeting.
5. Approval of bills.
6. Consideration of items carried over from the previous meeting.
7. Personnel matters.
8. Student affairs and curriculum.
9. Old policies to be reconsidered, reaffirmed or modified.
10. New policies to be considered or evaluated.
11. Existing programs to be reviewed or evaluated.
12. New programs to be considered and adopted.
13. Textbooks to be considered and adopted.
14. Reports from the superintendent, the secretary and the tax collector; the treasurer's report (financial statement), the solicitor's report and others.
15. Authorizations for conferences, workshops, field trips or other items.

urgent, unexpected issue. However, the deadline rule exists to help assure there will be no surprises.

Most boards have a policy (and/or procedural rules) that prohibit consideration of any item not on the agenda unless there is two-thirds majority vote to the contrary. Most last minute things are not that urgent and can be resolved administratively between meetings. If board action is necessary, a month's delay is usually not fatal. In addition, the board **deserves** time to study the issue before rushing to judgment.

Eventually the gavel falls for the final time of the evening, as the board completes its agenda and adjourns. Next month (if not sooner) there will be another sunshine meeting, another published agenda. In the meantime, board members will be busy receiving public input and suggestions formally and informally, as well as attending committee meetings (and for some, vo-tech, intermediate unit and community college meetings) and squeezing in a seminar or two. They will continue their constant efforts to faithfully discharge their responsibilities as America's most important volunteer elected officials — in the finest tradition of the Athenian theory of representative democracy in action.

Contributed by ***Donald B. Owen Esq.,*** *PSBA inservice education director.*

Operating effectively in the sunshine

Act 84 of 1986 opens more meetings to the public and the media, but it also recognizes that public boards are entitled to privacy.

Since the intent of the Sunshine Law is to make meetings more open and accessible to the public, it would be foolish for board members to resist the change in the law and to look for loopholes and ways to evade or circumvent it. Boards which historically have chosen to meet privately to discuss **all issues** always have run the risk of creating the image of conducting secret Machiavellian sessions. The truth is, most just cherish their privacy. Unquestionably, some of this privacy has been lost by virtue of the provisions of the new act, **but much has been preserved and enlarged.**

Act 84 bestows more privacy rights than the 1974 act in two major areas: 1) it creates additional categories for holding executive or private sessions; and 2) it abolishes the 30-minute limitation to meet in executive sessions when that need arises during a scheduled sunshine meeting.

Rather than lament the loss and look for loopholes, it is suggested that board members not ignore the public but involve them. To what extent the public is involved can still be controlled by board policy. It is important to realize that Act 84 does not create rights whereby the public or the press can interrupt or participate in the business of the board; it merely allows them to be present and observe.

Workshops vs. sunshine meetings

According to data published by PSBA in December 1983, 20% of the state's school boards conducted what are commonly referred to as "workshop" or "planning" sessions in the sunshine even though not required to do so under court decisions interpreting the 1974 act. Another 24% conducted deliberations part in public, part in private, while the remaining 56% closed their workshops to the public.

It can be presumed that for 44% of the boards, the new act will require little if any change in procedure. For 56% of the boards, the change probably will be as much psychological as it is legal.

Clearly 56% of the districts no longer will be able to meet privately in committee or as a whole to discuss **all** agenda items and merely vote for an agreed-on agenda at the sunshine meeting. The 1974 act merely required that "action" be taken in public.

School boards may wish to reconsider the use of numerous committees whose meetings also must be advertised under the act.

Act 84 does not destroy an individual board member's freedom of speech.

These boards will have to get used to discussing many items in meetings that are open to the public, hence the psychological adjustment.

The 'CLEAR' acronym

As indicated, Act 84 represents a balance between the need for private discussions on sensitive issues and the right of the public to observe and listen to its elected officials as they deliberate and decide the less sensitive issues.

Probably without realizing it, the Legislature has given birth to a new acronym — **CLEAR** — which seems consistent with images of openness and sunshine! The "C" stands for conferences; the "L" for labor negotiations; the "E" for employe relations; the "A" for attorney; and the "R" for real estate. These are the five reasons boards can meet privately. In all but one, they also can deliberate privately.

Information sessions permitted

The provision of Act 84 entitled "conferences" allows board members to **go out** to a conference or a seminar sponsored by PSBA, an intermediate unit, the Department of Education or other agencies "for the sole purpose" of receiving information without the public and the press having a right to be present. The provision also would seem to allow the board (or a committee thereof) to **invite** in administrators, architects, or whomever, "for the sole purpose of providing **information.**" (emphasis added)

Board members in the latter situation are cautioned not to use such an "information session" for purposes of "discussion" or "deliberation." To do so invites legal action and possible individual liability in the form of a $100 fine, plus costs of prosecution — not to mention loss of public respect for public education and its elected officials.

The 'LEAR' acronym

Take the "C" away from CLEAR (because you can't deliberate at a conference) and you are left with the acronym "LEAR". Three of these areas — Labor, Employe and Attorney issues — as anyone familiar with the typical school board agenda knows, often constitute a significant percentage of a board's business. The provision of Act 84 least likely to be a recurring item is Real estate.

One possible strategy that might emerge under Act 84 would be to have two meetings a month of the board as a committee of the whole. One would be for the limited purpose of considering all labor, employment, legal and real estate issues. This meeting **can** be held privately but does not have to be.

The second meeting of the committee of the whole could occur several days later. This public meeting is where **all other items** submitted for consideration would appear on the agenda for initial discussion or resolution. At this meeting, action (voting) on those "LEAR" items discussed privately has to occur.

Shyness and filibustering

Historically there have been two major concerns with a broader Sunshine Law:

1. The "glare" of the media would tend to stifle conversation and board members would be reluctant to share what's on their minds for fear of being accused in the newspaper the next day of having asked dumb questions or having made unsupported motions. In short, the timid would become shy.

2. The presence of the public would encourage endless debate or provide one or more board members a public forum to monopolize discussion by preening, posturing and otherwise engaging in self-serving political aggrandizement. In short, the bold would become brazen and filibustering would turn into a local art form.

The solution to the first concern probably will evaporate once board members get several meetings under their belts with the press in attendance. It is likely that the fear of speaking one's mind in public won't limit debate and that the media will not pre-occupy its reporting with the style of debate, but rather its substance.

The solution to the second problem — potentially endless discussions — can be re-

solved by any board which understands basic parliamentary procedure.

Possible parliamentary procedures

Consider these three scenarios.

Scenario One — Any board member should be guaranteed by policy the right to get any issue on the agenda by submitting that issue in a timely fashion for discussion at the next meeting. Once an item is on the agenda, it requires a second before discussion can begin. Without a second, the item will take virtually no group time. The rights of the minority (of one) are protected, but the will of the majority (of eight) rules the day. The issue becomes public, but it does not become policy nor does it waste time or provide an opportunity for filibustering. A board member being able to get an item on the agenda is an important aspect of democracy. Unfortunately boards (or those who construct the agenda) sometimes engage in "negative agenda building." This occurs by "sensing" that there are not enough votes for an item to pass, so it never gets on the formal agenda to be discussed, even if it is predestined to be defeated.

Scenario Two — Once a motion is seconded, discussion **can** occur. That discussion, should it tend to get long-winded, is always subject to these three motions: 1) to table the item until the next meeting; 2) to postpone it indefinitely; or 3) to refer it to a committee. Such procedural motions need a second but are not debatable; they simply are voted up or down. If a motion to table, postpone or refer is supported by a majority of those present and voting, the time of the committee of the whole is not unduly consumed. Any attempt at filibustering can be controlled by the will of the majority.

Scenario Three — As an agenda item (having been seconded) is being discussed, any board member can make a motion to "limit debate" or to "call the question." This procedural motion also requires a second and is not debatable, **but it does require six out of nine members** to vote to end the discussion. If six members vote to stop discussion, the agenda item itself is then voted up or down. Therefore, for an item which presumably has no hope of passing or for an item which a two-thirds majority of the board doesn't want to discuss any longer, time will not be wasted.

If a motion to "call the question" does not get six votes then discussion will continue. The motion to "call the question" can be renewed at a reasonable time thereafter. Regardless of whether the motion is likely to be approved or defeated, after a certain amount of discussion it becomes rather apparent (especially among nine members) what the pros and cons of the issues are, and how those who have spoken are likely to vote.

Another valuable piece of policy that might be worthwhile to have on the books to prevent filibustering is a provision that would limit any board member to no more than five or 10 minutes per topic. It's a rule that should not have to be invoked frequently, but it would be handy to have for that rare occasion when any one member would seek to monopolize discussion by preventing the chair from recognizing another member who wishes to speak to the topic or make a procedural motion.

Committee operations affected

What will Act 84 do to committee operations, which more than 80% of all districts use? The answer probably depends on the size of committees and, as a consequence, on the number of persons who constitute a quorum.

Act 84 does not destroy an individual board members' freedom of speech. It is well understood that a board member has no authority except when acting as part of the entire board at a duly constituted sunshine meeting. Yet nothing in the act precludes **one-on-one discussions,** between board members (or between the superintendent and board members) between sessions, **especially among board members who operate as a committee of the whole.** But such a conversation between two board members of a three-person committee could be construed as a "meeting" and therefore be in violation of Act 84, since a meeting is defined as "any pre-arranged gathering of an

Board members should not ignore the public, but involve them. The extent of involvement can be controlled by board policy.

agency which is attended or **participated in** by a quorum of the members . . . " (emphasis added), and the definition of the word "agency" includes "all committees thereof."

School boards, therefore, may wish to reconsider the use of numerous committees whose meetings also must be advertised under the act. (See "Publish, Post and Notify," p. 61.)

Public involvement in board meetings

What of public involvement under the new act? The words of the Commonwealth Court's Judge Watkins, enunciated in *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania V. Eisemann, (School Law Information Exchange, Vol. 20, No. 14, Feb. 22, 1983)* still apply:

> . . . an individual has no "right" to speak at public municipal meetings, any more than he has the right to address the state Legislature or Congress while they are in session. **According to custom and practice most local governments afford individuals the opportunity to address the local government bodies but such practice is not required and local governments surely have the right to establish and enforce rules and regulations governing individual's conduct at public municipal meetings.** Furthermore, there is no requirement that any individual attending a public meeting be given unlimited time to address the body on real or imagined evils or on any other matter. To rule otherwise would be to permit any person to destroy the effectiveness of a local government by monopolizing its time at public meetings where its business must be conducted . . . In the instant case the appellant was permitted to address the city manager and council members at a public meeting. However, when his address to council disintegrated into a belabored "shouting match" the city council voted to end discussion on the topic. As stated above, a local government body is under no duty to grant anyone unlimited time at a public meeting. Appellant, therefore, was not deprived of any "right" when council ended the discussion and sought to move on to other business. (emphasis added)

Virtually all boards have policy which allows for public input on agenda items, usually before the board begins its deliberations, debate and discussion. That policy typically imposes time limits on how long an individual can speak and how long any one topic can be discussed.

Three more aspects of Act 84

Three other aspects of the act are worth mentioning as they might impact on how boards conduct effective meetings.

- Adjournment and recesses.
- Where meetings are held.
- Right of the public to record meetings.

Act 84 says little about adjournment and recesses. Section 10 allows the board (as does Section 407 of the School Code) to adopt "rules and regulations necessary for the conduct of its meetings" as long as they are not made "to violate the intent of this act."

Common sense and parliamentary procedure ought to coalesce into written policy allowing the board (upon a majority vote) to take a recess or to adjourn early if: the hour is late; a meeting fails to generate or maintain a quorum; or, as in the 1974 act, any disturbance would render the ordinary conduct of the meeting unfeasible and order could not be restored. This is buttressed by that part of the definition of "public notice" which does not require readvertising "a recessed or reconvened meeting." It merely requires "posting a notice of the place, date and time" at the principal office of the agency or the public building in which the meeting is to be held. Presumably, that information also would be announced at the conclusion of the open meeting that is being recessed.

Where boards should meet

The 1974 act and Act 84 both require posting of notice "at the principal office of

the agency . . . **or at the public building in which the meeting is to be held.**" (emphasis added)

The boldfaced language suggests that all public meetings of the school board are held in the school building or some public building within the school district which is readily open and available to the constituency of the district.

Specifically it is suggested that the occasional practice of holding special meetings of the board at an architect's office, attorney's office, the board room of a trustee bank, or other similar places where the school board has business to conduct should be discontinued. Case law prior to the 1974 act *(Erie Municipal Airport Authority v. Automation Devices Inc. _____ C.D. _____ 1973)* supports this interpretation. In the *Erie* case the elected officials met in a private club and their actions were voided by the courts.

Recording the meeting

"Recording devices" are permitted under the new act. Clearly, given the technology of the times, tape recorders are allowed. This is consistent with case law in several counties. The more delicate, undefined issue involves videotaping. Many videotape cameras do not need auxiliary lights common years ago. As long as videotaping is not disruptive, cameras (with or without lights) may be allowed under the definition of a "recording device."

As long as videotaping is not disruptive, cameras, with or without lights, may be allowed under the definition of a recording device.

In 1981, several state associations representing local governments, including PSBA, met with media associations and developed a set of guidelines to "alleviate as much as possible, in advance, any anxiety or uncertainty which might otherwise exist as to respective responsibilities during the conduct or coverage of a public meeting."

Those 1981 guidelines in discussing "space requirements" to accommodate the media, state that "consideration should be given to the lighting and power needs media representatives will need to function effectively and responsibly . . .."

Publish, post and notify

Act 84 of 1986 repeats many of the provisions of the 1974 act with regard to publishing, posting and notifying the public of meetings; it also adds new requirements in these areas.

Board secretaries, who by law or custom are responsible for these activities, need to pay particular attention to several sections of Act 84, specifically:

- Section 3 — Definitions of "emergency meetings," "public notice," "special meetings."
- Section 5 — Recording of Votes.
- Section 6 — Keeping Written Minutes
- Section 8(b) — Notification Procedures for Executive Sessions.
- Section 9
  - (a) Publishing a list of regular annual meetings.
  - (b) Advertising special meetings 24 hours in advance.
  - (c) Honoring the "stamped self-addressed envelope" request.

Notice of regular meetings

The provisions of Act 84 in Section 9 are essentially the same as the 1974 act.

The district must give **public notice** of its first regular meeting of each calendar or fiscal year not less than three days before the meeting. At that time notice of the remainder of the regularly scheduled meetings shall also be **published** in a newspaper of general circulation, **posted** at the principal office or public building in which the meeting is to be held, and **notice** given to any newspaper, television or radio station or other interested party furnishing the district with a stamped self-addressed envelope.

The major change to prior practice under this provision involves the broadening of the definition of "agency" to include its

The major change to prior practice under Act 84 involves the broadening of the definition of "agency" to include its committees.

committees. For districts that have active committees, it would be wise to standardize the date, time and place each plan to meet throughout the year and publish that list **once** at least three days before the first meeting of the new year. Most districts do this on a calendar year basis, following reorganization of the board during the first week in December as required by the School Code.

Notice of special meetings

Any special meetings of the board (defined as any meeting scheduled after the regular schedule has been established at the beginning of the year) still require 24-hour public notice. The 1974 act was quite specific on this point, stating: " . . . at least 24 hours prior to the time of the meeting in the case of special or rescheduled meetings . . ."

Act 84 uses slightly different language: " . . . at least 24 hours in advance of the time of the convening of the meetings specified in the notice" in Section 9(a). Section 9(b) simply reinforces the 24-hour rule by providing (perhaps redundantly) that the notice must be " . . . in time to allow it to be published or circulated within the political subdivision where the principal office of the agency is located or the meeting will occur **before the date of the specified meeting.**" (emphasis added)

Executive sessions

Under Section 8(b) if an executive session is **not** announced at an open meeting "members of the agency shall be notified 24 hours in advance of the time of the convening of the meeting specifying the date, time, location and purpose of the executive session." Note that only the members need to be notified. Since executive sessions are closed to the public and press, there is no need to publish or post notice of these meetings.

As to the "purpose of the executive session," it is probably sufficient to simply specify labor, personnel, investigation, etc.

Contributed by ***Donald B. Owen Esq.,*** *PSBA inservice education director. Reprinted from PSBA's* ***Pennsylvania's Open Meetings Law,*** *September 1986.*

Board meetings: Tips for success

15 steps to achieve positive relations among board members and enhance board meetings.

Positive relations among board members enhance productive board meetings. This review offers 15 specific approaches to developing those positive relationships.

A board member who fails to follow these points will be likely to experience difficulty selling an idea to colleagues. Few experienced board members can claim they never violate any of these points. However, a self-assessment and a commitment to reduce the incidence of violation will help generate board harmony and individual member effectiveness.

1. Do your homework. Be prepared to consider an issue by studying all its aspects before the meeting. Providing sufficient back-up materials on issues should be board policy. Studying those materials is responsible boardmanship. Only then can a board member weigh all aspects of any issue.

2. Be issue oriented. The central focus of a school system must always be students. Therefore, the decisions made by the board should be in terms of what is best for students. It is irresponsible boardmanship to reject an idea that is good for the students because of who offered the idea.

3. Don't be single-issue oriented. School board members face many decisions on a wide variety of topics. If a member expends all energy on a single issue, then the other important issues receive inadequate consideration.

4. Try not to surprise anyone. Let other board members and the superintendent know your feelings before board meetings so the board can be more issue oriented (as opposed to suspecting your motives and thereby clouding the issues).

5. Be consistent. Not knowing what position a board member will take on issues creates disruption in board meetings. Being able to "read" individual board members makes the superintendent's task of formulating a workable recommendation more feasible. Board members owe voters and colleagues the opportunity to know what they stand for. Consistency assures that.

6. Be open minded. Be willing to consider points of view different from your own. Sharing differing viewpoints and forging agreements are how best practices are developed.

7. Listen to others. This point goes beyond merely receiving the transmission from others. To listen with intensity one must answer: "What is really being said?" Understanding the full message will enable board members to respond in a meaningful way to colleagues.

8. Look for points of agreement. Identify points of agreement and expand those points until a full agreement is reached. The listening skill mentioned in point seven can help find those areas of agreement.

9. Don't lecture. Elected public officials obviously said things that registered positively with the voters (or avoided saying things that did not). But that quality belongs to every member of the board. Therefore, being among equals, one can safely assume a lecture would not be appreciated.

10. Don't "zap" a fellow board member. While the "zapper" might feel good about the situation, the "zappee" might seek revenge. Even if intended as humor, the "zap" can backfire.

11. Avoid "showboat" votes. These votes are "for effect." Media reports usually mention the name of the one board

member who voted against the motion. Most elected officials know the benefit of one's name in media reports. However, "showboat" votes detract from board unity. If even a few board members play the showboat game, the board will appear "soft" on an issue, and unnecessary pressures may develop. However, do not confuse "showboat" votes with an honest minority opinion expressed by a "no" vote. Those are entirely legitimate.

12. Respect the roles of the chairman and other members of the board. Chairing a board meeting is a tiring and difficult task. The chairman must speak "for the board," prepare the agenda and conduct the meeting. The chairman may err, but don't be too quick to criticize. Respect also the roles of your colleagues. They, as do you, represent a large constituency.

13. Support decisions of the board (even when your viewpoints did not prevail). Don't undercut a decision. If you wish to have it reconsidered, approach that matter directly, not through subterfuge, obfuscation or other forms of deceit. There may be future issues when you will take a majority stance. You will want the minority on that issue to support it.

14. Be a district board member. Avoid the ward politics that can arise in single-member district elections. Board members make educational decisions, and these rarely are affected by artificial voting district configurations.

15. Leave it in the boardroom. Board members consider stress-producing issues in extremely emotional surroundings. On occasion, they will react to a colleague violating one of the 14 points above. Leave it where it happened — in the boardroom. After the meeting, again, become a group of citizens thrown together by a common interest — the children of the community.

How do you deal with the board member who violates these points on a too-frequent basis? I suggest two ways: 1) the chairman or a colleague can talk personally with the offending member; 2) stage a retreat of the board to talk about processes. In either case, work toward resolution of the problem. Again, make sure, through self-assessment, that you are not the problem.

---

*Contributed by **Jim Longstreth,** Alachua County school board member (Gainesville, Florida), and former superintendent in Alachua Co. Adapted from an article in the May-June 1987 **Florida Educator,** Florida School Boards Association.*

Board meetings don't have to be battlegrounds

People want, and need, to be treated fairly. If they feel they've had a "fair shake" or if those in authority make them feel they are genuinely interested in their problems, concerns and comfort, most often the foundation has been set for some mutual understanding.

A school board meeting, or any meeting for that matter, should first be thought of with people in mind. That's what a meeting is all about — people. Chances are that poor meetings usually got that way because the planners forgot, or placed less emphasis on, the concerns of people. In other words, they never put themselves in "the other guy's shoes."

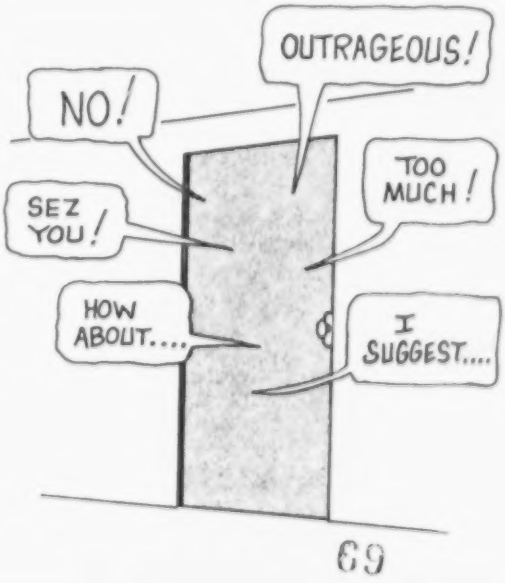
Start with good customer relations

How are people greeted at your school board meeting? Do they wander in and fumble for a place to sit? Or does someone genuinely and officially welcome them to their school board meeting?

Believe it or not, many school patrons still come to school board meetings with a sense of fear, distrust and thorough misunderstanding of the operational procedures of the board. It just stands to reason that if patrons of the school district are greeted with a smile and offered courteous attention (even if the person has an "axe to grind"), the board and administration stand a better chance of gaining some mutual understanding of the problem, the work and the concerns of both groups.

Along with that warm "hello," people need information. Do your board visitors get an agenda "cheerfully," or is the agenda guarded like Fort Knox? Has someone been assigned to hand them out? Is there a short capsuled statement or background material on each agenda item for informational purposes? Is there some time set aside at the beginning of each meeting to welcome visitors and briefly review how the board conducts its business, and how agenda items are developed or brought before the board?

If the presiding officer prefers to give just a short welcome, the board can rely on an attractive, well-written brochure to cover other points for the public. Such a pamphlet should include important facts about the schools; recite some of the legal "do's and don'ts" of school boards; and contain pictures and short biographical statements



Nothing can break down the business-like image of a board meeting like open criticism and confrontation.

of each school director for easy identification. Other information might include a map locating various schools, statistical data and principals' names and telephone numbers. Another important item in the brochure should be the policy and procedures for visitors to address the board, or an explanation on how they can get their concerns on the official agenda.

Whatever the information, the brochure should be easy, informative reading and allow for quick digest of the "when, where, why and how" of the board meeting.

Not only should comfort be a prime consideration in the planning of an effective board meeting, but so should the physical arrangement. Is the room big enough? Has the ventilation been checked? Will the board and various spokesmen be heard? If not, have arrangements been made for microphones? Are ash trays, paper and pencils available? And think about this: Have you ever thought of holding your board meeting in the school cafeteria where refreshments can easily be served to visitors and board members?

People's comfort and an effective meeting boil down to this. Make sure that a checklist is maintained and someone is responsible for providing adequate meeting arrangements, with special attention to the needs of people. Board meetings can be located anywhere. In fact, some districts make a practice of rotating such meetings in various parts of the community. Whatever the practice, think in terms of the people who pay for the schools.

Board meetings: The moment of truth

All the public relations, coffee, cookies and punch in the world won't help a school board or an administration that hasn't done its homework. Well-managed school districts usually reflect an administrative team that provides an ongoing program of information and progress reports to the board. And, responsible board members read them thoroughly, analyze proposals and plans before the decision-making process and, once decisions are made, stick to them.

There should be no surprises between board members and the administration. Nothing can break down the business-like image of the board, crack its credibility and sever its working relationship internally, like open criticism and confrontation at public meetings. Board members should not "play" to the audience. Administrators should not allow the board to be caught in embarrassing situations. Through proper planning with the board president and the administrative team, the superintendent can prepare for the unexpected and, at the same time, set the stage for the board to conduct its affairs in an orderly fashion.

Consequently, it is imperative that the administration maintain frank, open and continuing communication with the board. On the other hand, the board has a responsibility (through proper procedures) to inform the administration of citizen inquiries, complaints and concerns.

In general, a good board meeting will be bound together in sound board practices and policies, along with a well-constructed agenda and parliamentary procedure.

Audiovisual presentations on elementary guidance, outdoor education, high school social studies, reading programs and many others, offer an opportunity to inform the citizenry on certain school programs they may never know about. Such presentations can also give a "bird's-eye view" of the various programs of a particular school, as well as districtwide programs.

It is sound practice to have periodic curriculum reviews inviting department heads and principals to various meetings for specific presentations. Here again is another chance to inform the public (and even board members) about some aspect of the

school system. Also during the year, include highlights of districtwide programs such as health, cafeteria, transportation and maintenance services. Reports should be prepared in advance and distributed to board members and other key administrative personnel before their presentation.

Another helpful idea is to capsule and prepare short summaries as cover sheets for such reports. In addition, news releases or fact sheets should be prepared on such presentations since they will be a part of the regular meeting and warrant local news coverage.

Postcript to better board meetings

The path to good boardmanship is a never-ending process and a constant learning experience. Orientation sessions, usually reserved for new school directors, should be an ongoing experience. This process requires a commitment from the board and its administrative team. Such an arrangement means that the board is willing, within the personal limitations of each member, to take the necessary time and effort to review the district's educational program.

At the same time, the management team must provide the board with a variety of educational programs. These suggested activities may have an indirect effect to better board meetings:

- Consider board-administrator retreats where local problems and long-range plans are discussed in a two-day meeting. This idea could also be accomplished in a series of evening dinner meetings during the school year.
- Invite board members to sit in on various administrative meetings and

Checklist for board meetings

Here is a valuable checklist for improving board meetings. Keep these basic questions in mind:

__ Is the room warm and friendly?
__ Is the furniture comfortable?
__ Is the board table so designed that board members can see each other and yet be seen by those who attend school board meetings?
__ Does the room provide for comfort of visitors?
__ Is the room well ventilated?
__ Is a podium provided for those who wish to address the board?
__ Are provisions made for an amplifier?
__ Are arrangements made to accommodate members of the press, television and radio?
__ Does each school board member have a nameplate in front of him or her?
__ Do meetings begin on time?
__ Are provisions made for citizens to speak at an appropriate time during the meeting?
__ Are they listened to attentively and with respect?
__ Is there a policy relative to citizens addressing the board covering the following: their place on the agenda; the time allotted for such presentations; the information that each is to give to the board, such as name, address, and topic of statement?
__ If a reporter attends the meetings, is time set aside prior to the meeting to provide a briefing of what is to come up at the meeting?
__ If a reporter does not attend the meetings, are provisions made for sending information on each school board meeting to the local media?
__ Does the superintendent work closely with the reporter, the editor and publisher in keeping them up-to-date on what is going on in the school system?
__ Is there an indication of mutual respect between board members and between the board and superintendent?
__ Does each board member show that he or she has done the homework relative to agenda items that are to be brought up?
__ Does the board devote its time to major issues and policy discussion and avoid details and administrative involvement?
__ Except for questions and answers at designated times, do board members refrain from engaging in conversation and discussion with members of the audience?
__ Is a written summary of the actions taken at the board meeting distributed to all school personnel as soon as possible (no later than 12 hours after the meeting)?

observe first-hand how internal decisions and problems are ironed out.

- Plan visits to neighboring school districts, universities and colleges to talk with college faculty and administrators or observe educational programs and teaching techniques.
- Consider a trip to the state capital with scheduled visits to the Department of Education, the Legislature and the state school board association offices. And, of course, there should be appointments made with local state representatives and senators.
- Encourage board members and administrators to attend statewide workshops and conferences provided by the state school boards association. Here is en excellent opportunity to keep current on the top issues confronting the schools.
- Develop systematic visitations to local schools and support offices. Included in such a program should be classroom visitations, invitations to building-faculty meetings, school lunch programs, riding a school bus and observation of various extracurricular activities.
- Regularly mail background material on current educational issues and trends to board members and administrators. Magazine articles, research studies, and newspaper clippings concerning state and national developments will expose the management team to other viewpoints and ideas.
- Always provide information and agenda items to school directors who are absent from board meetings. A telephone call the next day with a round-up of what happened would be an additional courtesy.

Evaluating performance

How well are we doing? School board members can tell by looking at:

- Attendance at board meetings and workshops and the type of questions asked or complaints received.
- Telephone calls from constituents to board members. What kind of complaints, questions or comments do they have?
- Telephone calls, letters and other communication from citizens to central office staff.
- What are the media saying about the local schools?
- What do other districts' citizens and school staff say about your schools?
- Are your school staff members considered leaders in the county, state and nation?
- Do other school staff members visit your schools to see how you do things?
- Are members of your board active in local, state and national education circles?
- What do school suppliers say about your schools?
- How is staff morale? Are employes saying good things about the schools?
- What do respondents tell you on telephone surveys about the district?

Board meetings, of course, are open to the public and the board is required by law to inform the community of its meeting place, date and time. Most board members would quickly agree that it usually doesn't take any effort to get people to attend the meeting.

Today, if boards are to receive the necessary understanding and support of public education, they must "go to the people." Consider inviting students, community leaders, civic club officers, staff personnel and other local officials to board meetings. Even invite the local, vocal "critic." Formal invitations, whether accepted or not, may pave the way for two-way communication between the board and the community.

If the invitation is sincere, such an effort by the board and administration is an indication to the community and the staff that the board is truly committed to improved school communications.

Finally, make school-community relations an integral part of the school board's planning and decision making. Remember, schools are "people business" and should be "people oriented." Such a consideration will go a long way in keeping a board meeting from becoming a battleground.

Contributed by ***Nick Goble,*** *assistant executive director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.*

How to use your board meeting for effective communication

1. Make the board room environment as physically attractive and inviting as possible (comfortable chairs, room temp., ash trays, coffee, carpeting).

2. Plan ways to exhibit student work at each meeting.

3. Have students participate in each meeting (musical presentations, reports, introductions, etc.).

4. Have adequate parking close to the board room.

5. Distribute agendas to key people in the community as well as to the press and staff members.

6. Schedule meetings for convenience of the public (afternoon and evening).

7. Allow the public opportunities to speak to the board on agenda items, but set ground rules.

8. Involve staff members in the presentation of as many items as possible in each board meeting, with introductory remarks by the superintendent or assistant superintendent.

9. Have a special bulletin containing highlights of each board meeting in the hands of all staff members, key citizens and media people the next day.

10. Invite special groups to have representatives attend board meetings — taxpayers' associations, PTA, LWV, etc. Be sure they are introduced when they first attend, and spoken to at each meeting. Tell them you're glad they've come.

11. Hold budget meetings in the evenings, and publicize them well. Budget guides are helpful, too, even shopping lists.

12. Recognize outstanding programs and practices in the schools. Have the responsible staff members at the meetings and introduce them publicly.

13. Recognize the community contributions of citizens, especially those who have been involved in the schools. Send official letters of congratulations to each.

14. Be positive in approach.

15. Invite visitors to give their opinions at meetings at a special time on the agenda.

16. Invite local religious leaders to your meetings to give the invocation.

17. Invite students or local Boy and Girl Scout troops to give the Pledge of Allegiance.

18. Have "Welcome to our Meeting" fliers available to first-time visitors.

19. Have an administrator in the audience to answer community questions on how to address the board.

20. Put aside a special segment of your meeting for you to ask the community members present questions about their schools.

21. Whenever speaking to citizen groups or private individuals addressing the board, make sure they know you are interested in what they have to say.

22. Send a follow-up letter to every community patron who addresses the board. Thank them for their interest and, if possible, give them further information about their topic.

23. Have coffee available to the public.

24. Establish a curfew time for public comments.

25. Have outstanding students presented to your board for a special commendation.

26. Have a 15-minute positive presentation on a program in your district at one board meeting every month.

27. Don't talk in educationese. Remember you have an audience who may not know ECE from ADA.

28. If you are explaining intricate budget formulas, use a chalkboard or overheads.

29. Do not be afraid to admit you don't know the answer. Always offer to find out and do.

30. When you have a break in the meeting, go into the audience and speak to the public.

31. Have a special section set aside for the media. If possible, have the public information officer available to answer their questions.

32. When asked for an interview by a reporter, answer as sincerely as possible. If

you do not know the reporter, he may take everything you say seriously.

33. If you are presenting an important item to the board, prepare a statement in advance to hand out. You will more likely be quoted correctly.

34. Learn the names of the reporters covering your meetings.

35. If you are taking a position that is contrary to that of your administration, be prepared to answer their questions. Have back-up materials so that you can substantiate your decision.

36. If no news media representative attends your meeting, call the city editor following your meeting and offer to report highlights.

37. When directors get along, there is not much newsworthy about their meetings. Grandstanding for pure publicity can lower public opinion about your performance as a board member. Evaluate carefully your plan of attack.

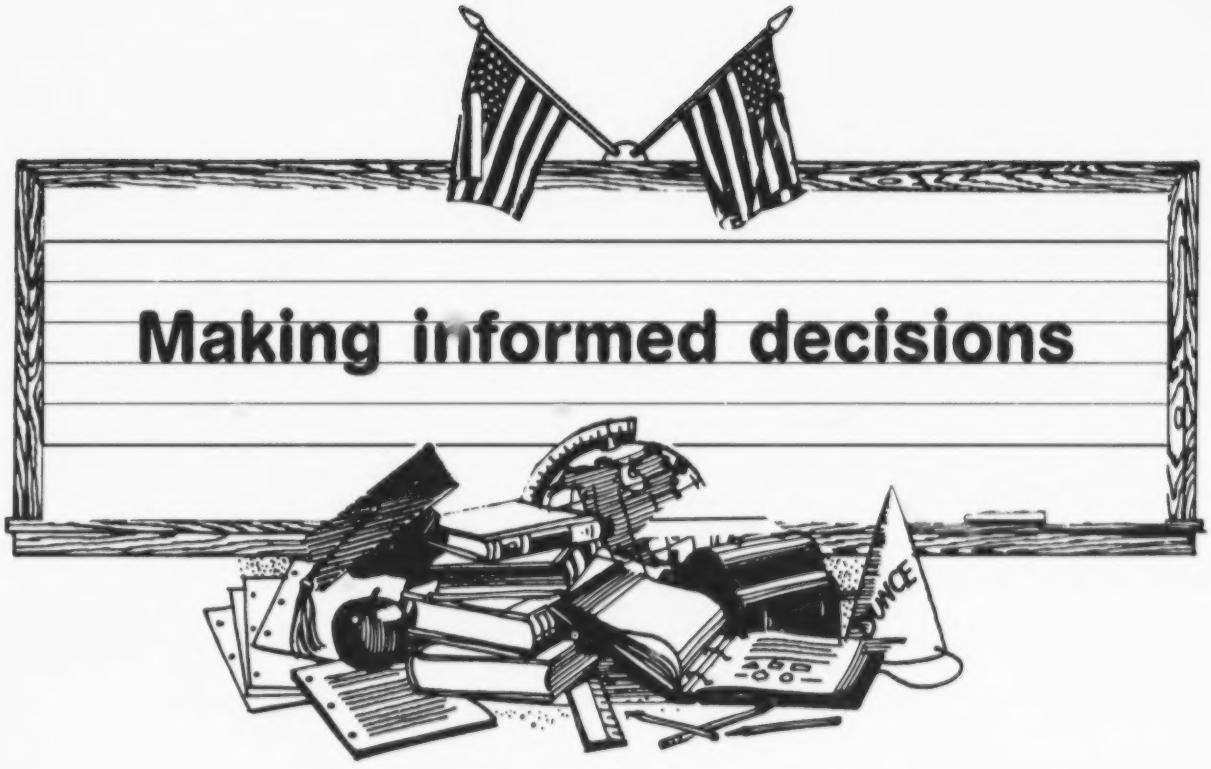
38. When you speak in your community, invite your audience to attend board meetings.

39. If you refer to paragraph two on page three, be sure everyone has (or can see) that same page or paragraph.

40. Move your meetings around to school sites occasionally and invite parents to attend.

Contributed by ***Ann H. Barkelew,*** *past president of the National School Public Relations Association.*

CHAPTER 4



Making informed decisions

71 Do board members really know what's going on?

77 Inservice training: Not an 'either-or' question

79 Inservice education: Dollars well spent

81 Board workshops: Effective tool for planning and learning

85 How to recognize an effective board member

87 Here's looking at yourself

89 84 tips for being a better board member

93 Why is planning important?

Do board members really know what's going on?

Probably every board member at some time has felt that he was getting either too little or too much information from the superintendent about the school district. Sometimes a board member will feel he is getting too much information on one subject but not enough on another. These feelings are natural consequences of the information explosion and the complexity of school operations. However, repeated instances of dissatisfaction with the information received ought to be of concern to all members of the board (and certainly to the superintendent).

School board members get many kinds of information from many different sources, of course. Most board members want to know the issues being considered by the Legislature, the happenings in neighboring districts, changes in school law, advances in teaching methods, trends in curriculum, the activities of state and national organizations, and other concerns. Much of this information is available from a variety of sources, ranging from local friends, teachers and newspapers to national journals and organizations.

The superintendent, however, remains the person most responsible for keeping board members informed, especially on matters related to the local schools.

The confidence and the trust board members have in their superintendent are closely related to the exchange of information between them. Yet few boards take the time to make sure they have a mutual understanding among themselves and with their superintendent about what to expect **before** problems arise.

What information about the operation of a school district should a superintendent be expected to give to the board of education? There is probably no one best answer to that question, but here are some of the factors to keep in mind.

1. Board members need information about both matters on which they will vote and matters on which they will never vote. Information is essential in making decisions, and it helps to distinguish information required to make decisions from "background information" about the operation of the district. Board members and their superintendent will agree more often on the information needed for a board vote (such as create new policy, adopt textbooks, close a school, approve a budget) than they will about the need for background information (student achievement, financial projections, legislative actions, public opinion).

School board members get many kinds of information from many different sources.

Thus, problems arise more frequently between the board and superintendent about "information" items rather than "action" items.

2. Good school board members want good information. Concern by board members about getting reliable information is usually a sign of a healthy district. A superintendent should welcome inquiries from board members because he will usually be able to do a better job with a good school board that has good information.

3. Board decisions can be no better than information board members have available to them. Members of the board and the superintendent should decide what information on upcoming major decisions might be useful. They should consider:

- How the information might reasonably be expected to help them make a better decision.
- How difficult it is to obtain reliable information.
- How much time may be required to gather the information.
- If the information requires outside assistance (legal advice, outside contractors or consultants), how much it will cost.

If this analysis indicates that the benefit from having the information is likely to justify the cost of obtaining it (time and money), then the board should ask the superintendent to obtain the information. A careful discussion of information requirements can be a wise step in reaching a good decision. Time invested to gather information that leads to a good decision could be far less than the time spent trying to undo the consequences of a bad decision.

4. A board member should not be expected to vote without being informed, and a board member shouldn't vote on something he doesn't understand. Thus, almost every agenda item will require some explanation, preferably in writing. If a board vote is necessary, even though there is not a real choice (there seem to be a lot of these), little explanation is needed.

5. The people who elect board members expect them to know what's going on. A board member who is unable to respond well to legitimate questions about the district may be perceived as not doing a proper job. This perception (whether true or not) is not good for the individual board member or for the district.

The voting public expects accountability from those who spend public money. A healthy relationship between the school district and the community needs the informed involvement of the many people associated with the district. The members of the board of education have an important and unique role in this relationship. Board members need to be informed by the superintendent about items on which they will be asked questions by the public. Just because it is not possible for a superintendent to know in advance what questions may be asked doesn't alter the fact that board members should be able to answer legitimate questions from the public.

Board members will often get questions about items in the local papers, major disruptions to the normal processes at any school, unhappy groups of citizens (especially parents), and safety issues. The superintendent and his staff should attempt to anticipate questions that will come to the board and help prepare them to give good answers.

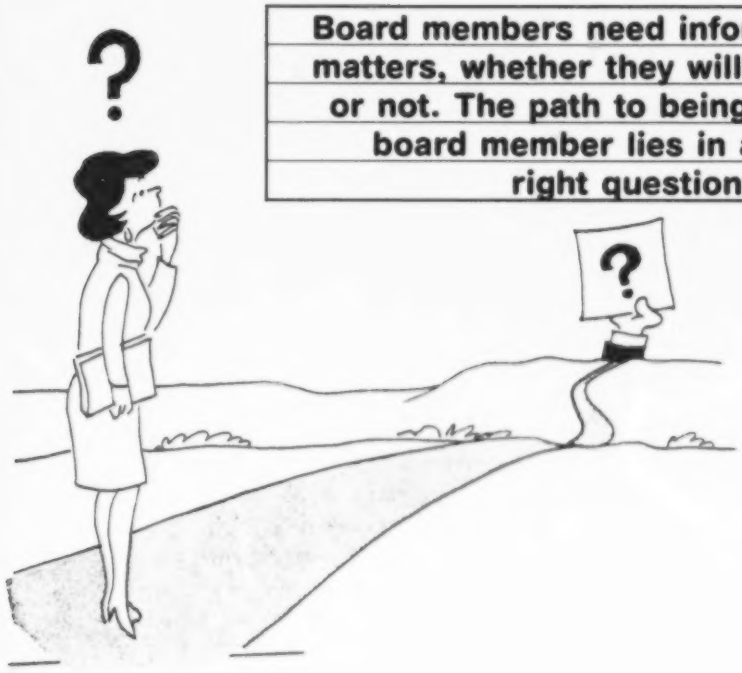
If a question to a board member wasn't anticipated, the superintendent should be prompt in obtaining information and assisting the board member to provide an accurate answer to a community member.

6. Superintendents will be wrong. It is neither practical nor desirable for a superintendent to inform the board about everything he knows and does. The administrative staff has duties other than calling board members to keep them up to date.

The superintendent must make judgments about what information should go to the board; there will sometimes be errors of judgment (usually these errors are most easily determined with hindsight). Superintendents, as well as board members, must recognize and accept the inevitability of these occasional errors. Perhaps it is more constructive to view these "errors" as an opportunity for the board and superintendent to better define their mutual expectations.

7. Obtaining information requires time. Giving answers to questions at a board meeting is different from preparing written reports between meetings. No one

Board members need information on all matters, whether they will vote on them or not. The path to being an effective board member lies in asking the right questions.



board member has the right to request information from the superintendent that requires excessive staff time. ("Excessive" may be defined as more than a half hour, or any other mutually agreeable limit.) If the board as a whole wants to have information from the superintendent, the board members should consider the staff time that would be required to meet their needs before making a request.

In general, a board member who would like to have the superintendent or staff spend time obtaining information is well advised to bring up the request at a regular board meeting. The board can then balance the board's need for accurate information against the other priorities for staff time.

8. It is the superintendent's job to be the administrator. One of the board's essential functions is to ensure the professional administration of the schools by providing the superintendent the opportunity to do his job. Board requests for information about administration of the district invite intrusions by the board into those areas of district operation that properly belong to the professional staff. Yet, the judgment of how well a superintendent does his job belongs solely to the board. Thus, board members must know something about the administration of the district. This category of information is likely to cause more misunderstanding between boards and superintendents than any other.

In general, the board should be kept informed by the superintendent of the administration of the district (his job) in at least three areas: implementation of district policy and goals; most administrative matters related to interaction with the public and press; and district problems that could lead to recommendations for board action at a later time. It is in the interest of a superintendent to keep his board informed about how he is doing his job and is spending his time.

9. A board member is not entitled legally or morally to all information about the district. Like so many questions before boards of education these days, there are legal ramifications that must be considered in certain requests for information. For example, an individual board member rarely has the need to examine a teacher's personnel file or a student's records.

Both board members and the superintendent need to be aware that it is not desirable or ethical to share all information. There could be occasions where legal advice may be needed.

Obviously, there are so many factors involved (surely more than the nine mentioned here) that no single "right" way to do things can be applied to all boards and

The superintendent is responsible for keeping board members informed. Take the time to make sure you have a mutual understanding with your superintendent before problems arise.

superintendents. Even among the members of one board, it is not reasonable to expect exact agreement on what information each member feels he needs to do his job well.

Districts differ in size, problems, community feelings and many other ways. In smaller districts board members can be informed about the events in individual schools, but in a larger district this may not be feasible. Districts with controversial problems such as school closings, budget cuts or strikes will have greater needs for accurate information than those with more stability.

Some board members are able to devote more of their time to board work than others. Some districts have a high turnover rate for board members. Some have diffculty finding suitable candidates for the board, whereas others always have contested elections. Some school districts are aggregates of portions of several villages, whereas others are relatively isolated from neighboring communities. Some districts operate with great attention from local news media. All the differences affect the information requirements of the board.

Despite these differences, it is possible to make some generalizations that most boards will find useful.

- The board and superintendent should discuss procedures for handling routine agenda items.
- The board should discuss the routine reports it receives (such as the financial reports) to make sure members are getting what they really need.
- The expected worth of any request for information should be evaluated to determine its priority for professional staff time before requests are made. Requests for information that will require extensive staff time (each board needs to define the meaning of "extensive") or require outside assistance should come to the superintendent (not to principals or administrative staff) from the board as a whole, not from individual members.
- For board decisions with long-range implications, an early discussion of expected information requirements can improve the chances of making a good decision.
- Board members need and should expect background information from their district in three areas: items upon which they will be asked to vote in the future (surprises have their place, but not at board meetings); general information about the operation of the district that will allow them to fulfill their role as sources of accurate information about the district; and information about the operation of the district that will allow them to accurately evaluate the job performance of the superintendent.
- Board needs for background information are best determined by a discussion involving the superintendent and the board.
- Regular discussion of information requirements can be part of the regular superintendent evaluation process or the board self-evaluation process. These regular discussions should not only prevent serious problems from arising among board members or between the board and the superintendent, but should also improve board-community relationships, allow the board to reach better decisions, and increase the mutual trust between the board and the superintendent.

Excerpted from the ***Journal of Educational Public Relations,*** *Vol. 8, No. 2, Educational Communication Center, Camp Hill, PA.*

Inservice training: Not an 'either-or' question

The typical board today has very few, if any, board members with two or more terms of experience. The statistics reveal that the average length of service in Pennsylvania is less than a full term while the national average shows that 37% of board members have served less than one term. (These data have not changed substantially since 1979 when this article was written. At that time, the term of board members in Pennsylvania was six years; it is now four years.)

The short life cycle of the average board membership just does not provide sufficient time to educate a school director properly while on the job. As soon as experience has been gained and the board member starts making a major contribution, the inclination may arise to quit because of the pressures, perhaps, or because the job is too time consuming.

Most elected or appointed board members accept the positions with little preparation for their duties, and it is remarkable that their efforts are often successful. The typical school director, after all, has devoted all energies to a profession, trade or business outside the schools and usually has had only incidental contact with the operation of schools.

Board members are likely to begin with only a limited understanding of their legal duties as board members and of the policy-making role of the board of education. With the limited experience of today's board members, the need for inservice training is more critical than ever before.

We all need the opportunity to grow and develop in our own professional and service functions. Members of board of education need specific activities that will provide necessary information and orientation to the important positions they occupy in education.

Inservice education for board members may take on many forms. In some cases it may be limited to the orientation of new board members, but this is a shortsighted approach. With the constant turnover of board members today, it is imperative that the orientation of board members to new and continuing concerns in education be extended throughout the tenure of the board member's service. The question is not "Should there be inservice orientation?" but rather "How can it be done most effectively?"

In analyzing the literature regarding inservice programs and the possible weaknesses of boards of education, it appears there are specific areas that need to be emphasized in inservice programming.

• **Working relationship with superintendent.** Current practice indicates clearly the continuing need for a better understanding between the board and the superintendent of each other's role and function. The concept of effective school management must be the mutual objective of both. Policy making is the function of the board, and administrative regulation is the function of the administrative staff. The line between the two is sometimes difficult to establish.

Certainly, superintendents should be privileged to make recommendations relative

With the limited experience of today's board members, the need for inservice training is more critical than ever before.

The school board and the superintendent have a mandate to communicate with students, parents and the taxpaying public.

to policies and the board should be privileged to review administrative rule to assure that it is compatible with board policy. A clear understanding and review each year is necessary for the board and the superintendent to keep in focus the distinction between board and superintendent authority and to help reduce board-administrator conflicts. Research and common sense support the notion that a strong superintendent is necessary.

A strong board is necessary too, but strength is cancelled out if they work against one another. A school district works well when the strength of the superintendent and the strength of the board are focused upon the same issues, not each other.

• **Establishment of broad educational program goals.** The most important function of every school board is to set goals for the school system. These goals become the criteria by which all performance is judged. The essence of leadership is the establishment of objectives, and then bringing resources into congruence with them.

• **Evaluation.** Another area that must have constant review for board members is evaluation. In today's society, accountability is the watchword. Evaluation must be encouraged and standards set in accordance with established goals and objectives. The board, to be effective, must evaluate itself, the superintendent, curriculum and the financial operation.

• **Communication.** Still another area that needs constantly to be addressed is the use of communication. This would embrace the method the board uses to communicate with the community, how group processes are used, and how interpersonal relationships are enhanced within the district operation. It is important that it be made clear who the individual is who is responsible for relationships with the media. The elected school board and the superintendent who is hired to carry out public policy have a mandate to communicate with students, parents and the taxpaying public. We must review to be sure we are communicating in the most effective manner with the community.

There are many other areas that are of concern and need to be explored during the tenure of a board member. With the eroding tax base, school districts are cautioned that they must not restrict themselves from the much needed inservice programs that are provided on the regional, state and national levels. It is the responsibility of each superintendent to provide inservice education and information to the local board of education.

All school districts have problems unique to their own district, and, therefore require local inservice training. But all board members must also be encouraged to attend regional and state conferences organized by PSBA, as well as the national conferences of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association.

Boards of education must be prepared to govern wisely in times of mounting pressure. If school directors are to be truly representative of the public, and, at the same time, see to it that students get the best education for the tax dollar, it becomes obvious that they are going to need some basic training and background. This does not mean they will become educational experts. Rather, it does mean that board members will gain the necessary tools and procedures which will allow them to act and perform consistently on behalf of the citizens and the communities they serve.

---

*Contributed in 1979 by **Dr. Wayne Doyle,** when he served as superintendent of Woodland Hills SD, based on his doctoral dissertation. Reprinted from **PSBA Bulletin,** July-August 1979.*

All school districts have problems unique to their own district which require local inservice training. But, all board members must be encouraged to attend regional and state conferences as well as national conferences.

Inservice education: Dollars well spent

Should school board members spend school dollars to attend conferences? Darn right!

There are plenty of good reasons why it is important that board members learn as much as possible about their ever changing job.

Being a member of a school board today is different than it was 10 or 20 years ago. The issues are more complex and difficult than ever before. The decisions call for an amount of experience, knowledge and training unavailable to a member who does not attend conferences.

In this day and age, there is no such thing as instant boardmanship. A person just off the street could easily make decisions about the price of gasoline, or which bus bid to accept, but these things are not the essential parts of being a good board member today. The decisions today are "people decisions." The most appropriate use of people in helping our children to learn is what it's all about now.

Nearly 80% of the weight of budget decisions involve people. Boards become efficient or inefficient in regard to how they make "people decisions." Since there are so many variables, the skill to make wise people decisions is essentially learned. Conferences help teach these skills without suffering through actual bad experiences. Provincialism is self-defeating these days.

Board members must know about the latest laws, rules and regulations, as well as brand new court decisions. Mandates from afar influence local decisions and finances.

School board members need to know about these things early in order to respond before they happen, rather than after. Conferences are quite useful in keeping members informed about the need to be active when an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Many board members attend conferences at considerable personal sacrifice. A carpenter, electrician, dentist or physician only makes a living when at work. Taking days off to attend a conference for those board members is costly. Other board members who work for companies, industries or businesses find they often have to use personal leave days or vacations to attend conferences.

Attending these meetings gives board members a chance to compare their views and ideas to the thinking of others. There is an opportunity to chat with other board members, who, in nearly the same circumstances, have given similar problems much thought.

Board members also have a chance to share their own good ideas and procedures so that all can benefit.

The struggle for power with employes calls for knowing the latest laws, what others are doing, and what they are not doing. Conferences help keep the purposes of school in mind so that school boards do not get stampeded into unappropriate positions.

I have saved the most important reason for conference attendance for last. Board members who talk with others from across the state and nation are bound to see the

It is important that board members learn as much as possible about their ever changing job.

By attending conferences, board members have a chance to share their own good ideas and procedures so that all can benefit.

need to maintain local control, to keep the public in public education.

Local control is the basis of our system. Public education, in turn, is the cornerstone of our democracy. This thought provides the impelling reason for board members to increase their boardmanship abilities by attending conferences.

People who think that school board conferences are junkets at public expense should visit a conference. The meeting rooms are packed; the exhibits are comprehensive; and board members talk school business in the discussion sessions, in the halls and at the table.

Boards should annually budget enough dollars to provide for their own inservice education. It helps to make good local decisions and prevent mistakes. These dollars are well spent.

Think of the cost of not attending.

Contributed by ***Dr. William Fox,*** *professor of education administration, Bowling Green University. Permission granted by Dr. Fox,* ***The Daily Sentinel-Tribune,*** *Bowling Green, Ohio, and the* ***KASB Journal,*** *Kansas Association of School Boards, Spring 1987.*

Board workshops: Effective tool for planning and learning

Local board-management team workshops or retreats are an effective way for school officials to learn and plan.

Board retreats are not new, according to Dorsey E. Enck, PSBA director of management services. "As a management tool, many of our local boards have used the workshop or retreat process periodically," he said. "But we are finding in recent years that boards are beginning to add the annual board workshop to their inservice requirements."

Enck believes this is an excellent practice and commitment by the board. He sees the trend as a natural extension of the increased desire by the board to learn and become involved with the management team in "a proper, but informed arrangement."

"School directors seem to be recognizing that providing efficient and effective schools requires their expertise," he said. "Board members who grow intellectually from their board experiences and apply solid techniques for planning usually develop effective schools that meet student needs, foster community support and efficiently utilize available resources."

There are many advantages to the workshop-retreat process, Enck noted. If properly structured, these programs will supplement the inservice training programs provided regularly by PSBA and other local and state agencies, he said. Enck cited several pluses to the retreat format:

- Retreats are mutually developed by the board and management team. They set the agenda and thus a cooperative consensus is formed at the beginning.
- The workshop, if properly designed, permits a free flow of ideas and suggestions. Brainstorming will be a part of the agenda.
- Customized workshops allow the board to zero in on specific issues, both long term and short term. Potential conflicts and crises can be eliminated by careful planning and anticipation.
- A relaxed, but structured atmosphere is conducive to discussions, goal setting and long-range planning.
- There is an opportunity for the board and the management team to become better acquainted, personally and professionally.
- One of the important paybacks to the board is that they can learn extensively about certain topics. Newer

Properly structured, these programs will supplement inservice education training programs.

84

board members can become better acquainted with the inner workings of the district.

- The retreat permits a comprehensive review of pupil personnel matters, curriculum development and learning resources — areas that are often pushed aside when other pressing matters come before the board.
- The retreat, or customized workshop, makes excellent use of the board member's time. Often board members must take personal leave from their employment to attend inservice training. Much information can be compacted into a day or evening program.

PSBA presents or helps arrange a wide variety of customized workshops, Enck said. Such activities range from teacher inservice programs on school law to full weekend retreats for board-administrative teams involved in long-range planning.

"We have noticed a shift away from a preoccupation with collective bargaining topics toward broader, positive personnel practices. We have had numerous requests for many educational topics such as curriculum management and the improvement of instructional skills," he said.

Workshop planning guidelines

Enck suggested several guidelines that will assist boards in planning and developing workshops or retreats.

1. Carefully define the issues or goals that need to be addressed by your board. Sometimes defining the problem is more difficult than the solution. Topics should be narrow, with indepth presentations and discussions used to "get into the subject." This can be enhanced with objective and experienced moderators.

2. Sites and facilities should be chosen according to the board's tastes and desires. The facility should provide pleasant privacy with little or no interruptions. Creative thinking requires concentration; time should be spent on involvement in the agenda and not on damaging diversions.

3. The schedule of events should be such that the workshop and retreat participants do not feel rushed. There should

Popular workshop topics available

- Teacher Evaluation and Supervision
- Effective Cafeteria Management
- Computer Technology
- Diversified Staffing
- Classroom Management
- Effective School Planning
- Fiscal Planning: Cost Effectiveness
- Building Better Board-Superintendent Relationships
- Cost Savings in Custodial Service and Building Maintenance
- Selecting a New Superintendent
- How to Analyze Insurance Requirements and Needs
- Policy Development
- Building Effective Evaluation Compensation Plans for Administrators
- How to Establish and Measure District Goals
- Basic Responsibilities of a Board Member
- How to Run an Effective Board Meeting in the Sunshine
- Preparing for Arbitration
- Preparing for Fact-Finding
- Preparing for Strikes
- Developing Compensation and Benefit Plans for Classified Employes
- School Law for Principals
- School Law for Teachers
- Conflict Resolution

be time to allow some socializing in an effort to learn to know each other on a personal basis. Board members need to know and understand each other when planning and decision making are required and teamwork is desired.

4. Boards sometimes shy away from workshop or retreat activities because of public criticism or media coverage. This really has not been a problem when boards have announced up front what the purpose of the workshop is, and have explained the resulting plans and changes that may follow. PSBA has helped by providing credibility and assisting local boards in these arrangements and announcements.

5. The procedures utilized in workshop and retreat activities become as important as the objective. There is an opportunity for much "spinoff" in improving the board's public image, employe recognition of the board's willingness to learn and plan, and a feeling of growth and accomplishment on the part of the individual board member.

6. Successful workshop activities build in a follow-through component to assure that plans are carried out. Expertise and competent consultation can help the school board to maintain a proper perspective in planning and policy setting.

The association has developed several topics and programs and is prepared to assist any local school district in arranging retreat training programs. "Because of the vast array of PSBA resources," Enck stressed, "we can design a program to meet local requirements and address practically any aspect of management and governance." (See suggested topics, p. 82.)

Reprinted from ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *June 1985.*

Board workshops permit free flow of ideas and help build good working relationships.

How to recognize an effective board member

In every organization there are sustainers and achievers. Sustainers tend to see themselves as trapped and unable to make a difference. Often they shift their energy to fault finding and describing problems, rather than to finding creative solutions. Achievers, on the other hand, believe that the willed future supercedes the logical future.

School board members who are achievers believe they can make a difference. After completing my study of more than 500 effective schools, I identified 12 pervasive behaviors of effective school board members who were often catalysts toward encouraging excellence in their districts. While there may be others, these 12 behaviors were the most frequently mentioned or observed.

1. Have deep commitment to public education and to all the children of all the people. Effective school board members tend to see the whole donut rather than the hole. They're not just supportive of programs that their kids are involved in, but rather consider a balanced program for all children, regardless of their ability.

2. Insist on establishing educational priorities rather than have a "let's do it all" attitude. Effective board members establish clear, concise direction through policies that are communicated regularly. School personnel are trained now better than ever before to deliver on the priorities once they know precisely what their boards expect.

3. Are knowledgeable. They study the board packet in advance of meetings and contact staff for clarification prior to meetings. "Pocket held" questions at board meetings prove divisive and weaken the entire organization. There is still great confusion as to whether school board meetings are public meetings or meetings where the public can view the actions of their elected representatives.

4. Make every effort to demystify the bureaucracy while fulfilling legal requirements. Effective board members, like business leaders, are close to the "customer." They do everything they can to emphasize service through active assistance.

5. Inspire cooperation with and through people. They do not foster a "we-they" attitude (including with fellow board members). Effective board members model the kinds of behavior that they expect to see in their staff. They recognize that there can be and should be unity through diversity, common courtesy by listening, paraphrasing, positive recognition and politeness. Unanimous decisions on board items should not be confused with a "rubber stamp."

Effective boards of education have often worked out their differences with each other prior to the meetings. There is no place for building one's own image at a fellow board member's expense. Positive school board climate can do more to advance a district's goals than any other single factor. In fact, when a climate of cooperation is nonexistent, all other qualities suffer. Included in this positive climate is cooperation:

- Between board members.

Here are 12 behaviors of effective school board members who serve as catalysts toward encouraging excellence in their districts.

School board members who make a difference develop a climate of cooperation and service.

- With board representatives at district level.
- With board representatives at school level.
- With parents and community members.
- With students.

6. Invite wide participation in various ways: board minipresentations; board-district representative meetings beyond executive sessions; community forums and task forces; principal-board dialogue; student board members; minigrants for creative ideas; recognition of exemplary efforts of staff; open agendas for residents who would like to address the board.

7. Foster employes' responsibility rather than control them. Responsibility reaps tremendous dividends. Effective school board members define the responsibilities for key staff, invite district administrators to define areas of responsibility in delivering a quality school system, and together reach consensus on a plan of action. Quality needs to be defined specifically if the organization is to attain quality.

Effective board members give staff both public and personal recognition for being responsible. They create ownership through responsibility. Effective board members recognize that they gain power by giving it away.

8. Are great listeners. Big winners listen. They listen in the third person (listen as if they were going to share information heard with another person.) They listen to more than the words spoken: They listen to nonverbal language, to people's feelings, to motives, to questions. They encourage training programs for all their employes in listening techniques.

9. Foster parent-educator partnerships. They invite parent involvement at each school level and actively participate in recognizing parent volunteers. Even if there is not enough time to participate in parent recognition programs, effective board members make the time. Communicating that they value participation is critical.

10. Look for the positive while working on the problems. Effective board members recognize that there is no perfect system. They know the way you move closer to a quality program is to bring attention to the effective practices and to the effective people who make them work. They recognize that problems are simply questions that need to be solved.

11. Are perceptive rather than judgmental. A judgmental person has his mind made up and seeks to gather information to prove a point, while a perceptive person seeks to gather all the data and then makes up his mind regarding the issue. Effective board members are honest and objective. Being honest and objective requires gathering as much data as possible in making policy decisions. They know that there is a back side as well as a front side to every question. They tend to act once they've studied the pros and cons.

12. Are compassionate. They really care about people and their feelings. Their empathy is witnessed by the numerous publics they serve. Compassion is woven throughout their proceedings in how they relate to others.

School board members who make a difference develop a climate of cooperation and service. Their expectations are high and they provide emotional support for causing excellence to happen. They create responsible employes by recognizing responsible behavior. Their deep sense of moral and ethical behavior shows in their priorities and policies, and in their relationships. Permeating their decisions is a sincere belief that the public schools are the place where we all come together to teach each other, learn from each other, challenge one another, energize one another and comfort one another.

Contributed by ***Gene Bedley,*** *principal of El Camino Real High School, Irvine USD, California. Reprinted from the* ***MSBA Journal*** *of the Minnesota School Boards Association, 1984.*

Here's looking at yourself

Truthfully, how good is your performance as a school board member? If you haven't thought about that question, perhaps it's time for you to conduct a personal assessment of your work. By doing so you can gain some sense of your effectiveness — as well as determine the degree of satisfaction you are receiving from your school board service.

While there are many ways you might evaluate your own work and contribution, one quick and reliable way is to ask yourself some basic questions about your attitude and performance. Listed below are 10 areas of school board responsibility that deserve careful consideration. Each is followed by specific questions for starters.

• **As a school board member, I want our community to have quality schools.** How would I describe a quality school? During my service on the board, have I consistently voted in a way that leads to the development of the kind of school I have described?

• **I want our board to provide meaningful educational leadership for our community.** Have I assumed my personal responsibility for openly helping the board to achieve this objective? What actual leadership responsibilities have I assumed as a member of the board? What additional actions could I take in the future to further improve the board's educational leadership?

• **I want our board's policies to be sound ones.** Do I understand the policy-making process? Have I played an active and helpful role in policy making during my term of service? Have I consistently worked within our board's policies?

• **Our schools need to use sound educational practices.** Do I have a good understanding of the educational research that is relevant to our schools? What efforts do I make to keep abreast of educational changes? What reading about schools and education have I done lately? What meetings devoted to school board service have I attended in recent months?

• **Our board should work hard to communicate with the community and explain the work of our schools.** Have I assumed my share of the responsibility in speaking about and for our schools to various groups in the community? How often do I have discussions about education with friends and neighbors?

• **It is important that the board establish a good relationship with the news media and communicate clearly with them.** How accurate and careful am I

An effective school director knows that good board service begins with knowing one's strengths and weaknesses. Evaluate yourself in 10 important areas.

An evaluation provides not only guidance for future performance but also acts as a device to renew enthusiasm for and commitment to your responsibility.

in talking with reporters and editors? Do I make an attempt to represent the views of the entire board, or do I limit my remarks to my own personal views?

• **Board members should act as a governing body and avoid inclinations to act in their own interest.** How effectively do I represent the public? How often do my own personal views and biases get in the way of our decision making?

• **A board should seek to keep the focus of its work centered on the student.** Do I keep my own personal focus on what is best for young people? How much thought do I give to ways to improve the curriculum and instruction for students?

• **A board must strive to maintain good working relationships among board members.** How well do I work with my colleagues? Do I really know them? Do I avoid some of my colleagues? Do they seem to respect my views and comments? Do I respect theirs? What degree of trust exists between me and my colleagues?

• **A board should seek to maintain a climate of cooperation and trust with school system employes.** How have I personally contributed to this climate? How do employes view my work as a board member? Do I have a good working relationship with the superintendent of schools?

Obviously, the more positive your response to the questions, the more likely you are to be considered an effective and successful school board member.

The experienced school board member knows that it is essential to examine critically his or her own performance from time to time. One's effectiveness must be assessed — and tested. And in the process, each board member should examine his or her personal contribution to creating the kind of board of education that is required to direct and supervise today's schools effectively.

The successful board member knows that such an evaluation not only provides guidance for future performance, but also acts as a device to renew enthusiasm for and commitment to his or her responsibility. And school board service is a sober responsibility. After all, what we do with our children while they are in our schools can alter the whole course of their lives. We can give them a jump on life or put them in a hole they'll never climb out of. And unless we know our strengths and weaknesses as board members, we can do little to make schools the kinds of places we intend them to be.

Contributed by ***Dr. James M. Benjamin,*** *author of The Board, published by The Master Teacher, Inc., Manhattan, KS.* *Reprinted with permission. Copyright 1983. All rights reserved.*

84 tips for being a better board member

Functions of the school board

1. Understand the board of director's three primary responsibilities — planning, setting of policy or legislation, and evaluating.
2. School directors are state officials charged with putting the intent of the state legislature into operation in each local school district.
3. School directors represent all of the people within the community.
4. The selection of competent administrators is one of the board's most important functions.
5. Planning and maintaining school facilities is a function of the board of directors.

Gathering information

6. Request a copy of the written board policy manual and administrative rules of the district.
7. Become familiar with your school board organization (officers, committees, etc.).
8. Obtain an explanation of the authority and responsibilities of the board, superintendent, administrators and individual board members.
9. Request an explanation of how the chain of command really works.
10. Study the district budget and become familiar with school finance.
11. Obtain a copy of the school's educational philosophy.
12. Find out the curriculum standards.
13. Understand the organization chart of the school district's management structure.
14. Review all collective bargaining agreements.
15. Get a list showing the number, location and condition of schools and other buildings owned or operated by the district.
16. Look at minutes and agendas from past board meetings.
17. Know your community relations responsibility.

Skills for effective leadership

18. Understand group dynamics.
19. Understand decision-making processes.
20. Have a good grasp of the language and terminology of education.
21. Understand the dynamics of collective bargaining with employe groups.
22. Learn how to communicate with legislators and other government officials.
23. Remember to think deeply and sometimes accept a reality that is contrary to your beliefs.
24. Be able to hold the minority viewpoint when voting on a given issue, then openly support the majority vote in your community.
25. Learn how to get and present facts, not merely interpretations of them.
26. Encourage ideas and opinions from students, staff and citizens of the district and try to incorporate their views in your deliberations and decisions.
27. Keep an open mind so that you can accept and evaluate new concepts.

Plan, become familiar, learn, encourage, strive, work, support, be aware . . . to be a better board member.

28. Maintain a sense of humor.
29. Learn and practice the art of compromise.
30. Strive for teamwork.
31. Assess your personal strengths and weaknesses and strive to maximize your strengths while minimizing your weaknesses.
32. Improve your ability to work with people.
33. Work at your ability to assemble and evaluate information.
34. Communication skills are necessary, especially speaking skills.
35. Representation skills.
36. Policy and decision-making skills will be very important.
37. Know how to effectively use human and material resources.
38. Have the ability to perform under pressure and deal with conflict.

Conduct of new director

39. Go slow in the beginning.
40. Welcome people who come to you about school issues.
41. Do not promise citizens you will do something; you are part of a nine-member board and cannot act unilaterally.
42. Make a concerted effort to be informed.
43. Give the superintendent and staff your public support.
44. Keep out of the quicksand of teacher personnel problems.
45. Accept criticism without sacrificing dignity or compromising convictions.
46. Do not allow differences of opinion on policy to become personality conflicts.
47. Ask questions.
48. Be committed to high quality public education.
49. Keep abreast of current local, state and national educational issues.
50. Devote time, thought and study to proposed actions, studies and recommendations.
51. Remember it will take at least 12 months of on-the-job experience before you may feel you are operating effectively.
52. Read educational books, magazines, newsletters and other current periodicals.
53. Learn how to deal with the news media.

Conduct an effective meeting

Before the meeting:

54. Comprehensive background information on each agenda item should be distributed to board members three or four days before the meeting.
55. Agendas should be distributed to key people in the community, the press, and key staff members, but not before the board members get their copies.
56. The news media and the community may want to know what the school district is hiding if they don't get a copy of all informational materials included in the board's agenda. Give them all information except confidential material.
57. Have the board encourage people who wish to speak on any item on the agenda to call or write in advance of the meeting.
58. Know parliamentary procedure.
59. Arrange seating for board members in a V-shape or modified U. Never sit in a straight line staring at the audience.
60. Schedule board meetings at various locations throughout the district. This gives the board an opportunity to listen to the concerns of a wider cross-section of people.
61. The meeting room should be well ventilated with adequate seating and ashtrays.
62. Have legible name plates in front of every member.
63. Schedule a larger room as a backup in the event a large crowd unexpectedly shows up.

At the meeting:

64. Start on time.
65. Avoid executive sessions when possible.
66. Provide a special table for the news media and assign a knowledgeable school representative to sit with reporters.
67. Don't allow citizens to speak out at any point in the meeting. Set a time limit for speakers and stick with it. A school board will lose control of its meetings if it doesn't do this.
68. Humanize the meeting by having students, non-instructional people, or teachers make presentations about educational programs, bus transportation, cafeteria or maintenance functions.

69. All handouts distributed during the meeting should be given to everyone present.
70. The board and staff members should avoid becoming defensive or overreacting to criticism.
71. Avoid off-the-cuff remarks which may be printed verbatim in the newspaper the next day.
72. Avoid educational jargon and explain to the public any action or discussion which may need to be clarified.
73. Don't discuss minor items for an inordinate amount of time.
74. Opposing viewpoints of board members should be expressed at meetings but, after a vote, the board should unify for the good of the district.

After the meeting:

75. Distribute a fact sheet highlighting the major points of the meeting to key community people, staff and reporters as soon as possible.
76. A spokesman for the board should be available to answer news media questions.
77. Follow up on requests immediately.

Influences on school director

78. Become knowledgeable about the School Code.
79. Communicate with the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.
80. Become involved with the National School Boards Association.
81. Know about the complex web of federal, state and local agencies that influence how schools function.
82. Be aware of statutory or constitutional laws governing your conduct.

Resources

83. Talk with the superintendent, staff and other board members for personal suggestions or reference to printed material.
84. Call PSBA (toll free (800) 932-0310) for a list of useful books and brochures to help you become a better board member.

Reprinted from ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *March 1984.*

Why is planning important?

These six reasons why a board should plan provide a good outline.

Planning is the key element in the board's policy function and is the process that allows the board to provide thorough and efficient educational programs with limited resources.

Dan Tullett, executive director of the Tennessee School Boards Association, and Patsy Carriott, a Kingsport City (TN) board member, have enumerated six reasons why a board should plan.

1. Planning is the process by which a school board exercises leadership. School board members can have the greatest impact on a school system through planned change. While it may not be difficult to initiate changes in the system, wise board members realize that changes that are accepted, that persevere, and that are the least threatening are those that have been made with forethought and careful planning. Rapid change will certainly have an impact on the system but generally a resounding negative one. Thoughtful planning and communciation of those plans enable a board to move toward its goals with efficiency and support.

2. If a board knows where it wants to go, it is more likely to get there. A carefully developed written plan increases the probability of success. Boards too often find themselves operating with no clear idea of what they want to accomplish. With effective planning they not only know where they are going, but have carefully developed strategies to help them get there.

3. The educational program which a community makes available to its children is far too important to be left to chance. The quality of the educational program provided to the children is the paramount responsibility of the board. Boards should and must be accountable for what happens in the system.

Having a well-conceived plan for the educational program and the means for implementing it take the chance out of what happens in the system. Responsibility and accountability become the rule rather than the exception. After all, the improvement of learning is the bottom-line reason for planning.

4. Maximum utilization of a community's resources is possible only through long-range planning. While each community's resources are variable and unique, it is only through planning that effective utilization can occur. Tapping those resources should be neither a random nor sporadic effort, but should be an integral part of the overall planning process. Failure to use those valuable community assets may cost the school system in an economic way, and will definitely cost it in terms of community support. When a board follows a well-conceived plan, the community perceives that the schools are operated in a businesslike manner. Public support and excitement can result.

5. Effective planning allows a board to develop and maintain a continuity of purpose. Once a board has established its goals, it greatly diminishes the natural tendency to move in innumerable directions at the same time. The board has a clear idea of its primary focus, has a timetable for implementation and reaffirms on a routine

basis its continuing efforts toward its stated purpose. Continuity is maintained regardless of changes in the administration or membership of the board.

6. Adoption of a long-range plan is conducive to board unity. The process of developing a long-range plan provides board members an opportunity to share their expectations and priorities for the school district with other members. It helps the board define differences among members and through compromise leads to group commitment to goals and objectives. A commitment to the same goals and objectives will result in a more cohesive and more effective board.

Boards who plan effectively seem to provide quality programs with less cost and wasted effort. This certainly is a better use of board talent and time and is in keeping with the legislative responsibility given to local school boards.

Leading the process

Good planning involves everyone in the organization, but is usually led by a few exceptional people who have the following characteristics in varying degrees.

• **Inquisitive** — An active learner, who is insatiably curious about business, the profession and the world, taking the initiative to get at causative factors and reasons why. An avid questioner and listener with a quick, wide-ranging mind.

• **Conceptually Uninhibited** — Imaginative, bold and a nonconformist in thinking who looks for new ideas or new ways to apply old ones and has intellectual power to grasp and sort implications and concepts quickly. Speaks his mind but reacts well to others' ideas.

• **Constructively Competitive** — Enjoys intellectual competition and is at times purposefully argumentative to test the strength of others' positions. Looks for strength and weakness in ideas and wins debates without alienating people.

• **Practical** — Sound, astute and realistic in risk-balancing judgments, is analytical and objective about what can be done, how fast and with what resources. Avoids self-delusion and tempers own enthusiasm with pragmatism. Logic and manner are persuasive.

• **Tenaciously Tolerant** — Able to cope with criticism and rejection; realizes that people are slow to change, but attempts to persevere through the use of logic and reason.

• **Multidisciplined** — Knowledgeable in several fields and keeps current with developments in many related fields.

These characteristics are not easily found in any or all people and are not necessarily the bottom line in planning, but they should be sought and identified in persons expected to lead in the planning function. Although such people may not be in key positions in a school district's present structure, they can be used in the vital function of planning.

Planning is deciding in the present what to do in the future, along with the necessary steps to bring it about.

Using a committee

Planning committees can be used effectively to look at the "big picture" and then solidify a game plan for meeting identified needs. Financial planning is a process to be used by all individuals or committees, while there may be a specific assignment to a committee for planning in general. Such a committee should save the board members many hours, and also result in a better plan using the special talents that exist on each board in varying degrees.

Planning encourages systematic thinking ahead by educational leaders. It leads to better coordination of district efforts and to the development of performance standards and accountability.

The planning committee should represent the characteristics stated earlier and major identifiable activities impacting on financial and program matters. They can use special task force subcommittees for developing needs, information and assessment procedures.

Everyone should have in writing a description of the task and the established parameters for operation. The chairman of the committee should have an established procedure for reporting to the board and the administrative team. The committee should have secretarial assistance to ensure efficient and thorough recordkeeping. Records should be accurate and understandable to all involved. The records and the reporting are necessary for the plan to evolve and be useful.

A stringent time schedule ensures less trivia and more significance, and the timeliness of information and implementation. When completed, the report should be presented to the board and the public in a clear, concise manner with emphasis on understanding and public perception. Included as part of the overall plan should be an implementation feature which aims at completion, establishing all needs. Written policy is recommended to ensure implementation.

These suggestions or concerns should be helpful in establishing a more formal approach to planning and fiscal management. The suggestion should be thought of as simply a plan to plan.

Benefits of planning

Educational leaders must recognize that planning is deciding in the present what to do in the future. Planning comprises the determination of a desired future and the steps necessary to bring it about. It is the process whereby school districts reconcile their resources with their objectives and opportunities.

School districts that do little forward planning tend to ignore opportunities in line with their resources. As a result, these districts are most susceptible to being affected by the changing times, shifts in perceptions and outside pressures.

Planning encourages systematic thinking ahead by educational leaders. It leads to a better coordination of district efforts and to the development of performance standards and accountability. It causes the district to sharpen its guiding objectives and required written policies. Planning results in better preparedness for sudden new developments. It brings about a more vivid sense of interacting responsibilities among the administrators.

Any district can take the first step toward creating the missing link: A soundly conceived and implemented approach to short-term results with long-range, thorough, meaningful measurement and evaluation of existing planning procedures.

Realistic expectations

When getting involved in the planning effort, school districts must avoid some common pitfalls.

Some educational leaders see planning as an effort to know the future as if through a crystal ball. The future is really unknowable. These educators fail to understand that planning is an integrated way of determining and identifying individual developments that may impact on the future. The planning process requires flexible action programs which can take advantage of all opportunities that are revealed. Adjustments must be made as actual events unfold; plans according to written policy must be monitored and updated.

Many school districts go into planning looking for the "cure-all" for all school problems. Overreacting, they perceive planning as a surefire answer to everyday problems. To ensure success, they place their

most valued specialist in charge of the plan. Unfortunately, specific expertise in a specialty area does not guarantee success in the planning function. These people should be definitely involved in the process but not necessarily in leadership roles in planning.

Finally, one of the most difficult pitfalls to avoid is "beheading" the bearer of bad news. Business tends to reward the person who first brings truthful bad news. Planning should identify both opportunities and problems within a time frame that allows for changes in action or implementing plans.

Planning cannot solve problems, but it can focus the board's efforts on what the problems and opportunities are, help boards to consider the reasonable responses, and guide in making better decisions about the future of the school district and its educational programs.

Keeping on target

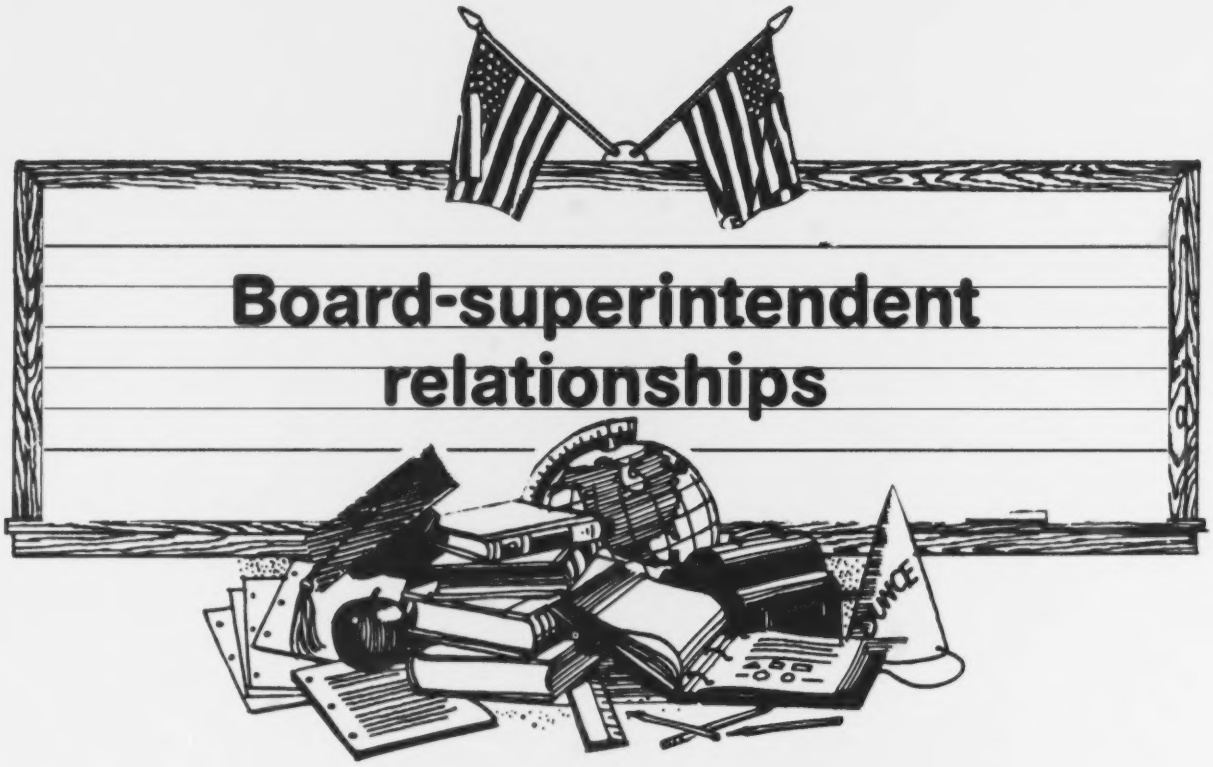
The following is a simple checklist for keeping your financial planning on target.

- **Stay flexible.** Plans must be flexible. Conditions and situations change regardless of how well you plan.
- **Maintain a balanced outlook.** Do not overreact, but keep moving on a timely basis.
- **Get the entire management team involved.** Success depends on everyone having valuable input and identifying with the plan.
- **Be critical of your assumptions and forecasts.** Data lend themselves to interpretation and are only as good as the mind that interprets them.
- **Strive to get beyond today.** Three-year budgets rather than one-year budgets. View the big picture by temporarily washing out the day-to-day operations.
- **You must be involved to plan.** Get everyone involved and commitment will follow. The developed plan must have something for everyone involved in the process.

Planning is not a stepchild of school district organization, but a vital part of the educational management process.

Contributed by ***Dorsey E. Enck,*** *PSBA director of educational management services. Reprinted from* ***Understanding School Finances,*** *©1987, Pennsylvania School Boards Association.*

CHAPTER 5



Board-superintendent relationships

99 Selecting the right superintendent

103 Learning the ropes of school board leadership

109 The board of education and the superintendent

113 Policy making, the board and the superintendent

Selecting the right superintendent

The caliber of educational leadership determines the quality of the educational system in any community. The degree of success of the superintendent is certainly related to the degree of success of the board and, in a Siamese twin relationship, the reverse is true. Therefore, the selection of the school superintendent is probably the most critical function performed by boards of school directors.

More than ever, superintendent selection is crucial in today's educational climate, which seems to be shifting responsibility for funding public education from the national and state arena to the local level. The trend toward more taxation at the district level heightens accountability for both board and superintendent. The board's total performance receives careful scrutiny as more tax dollars are collected and spent locally.

Taxpayers are insisting that school boards fulfill their legal duty of superintendent selection in a thoroughly efficient manner, in tune with the unique needs of the school district. Choosing an educational leader is not a routine chore. Boards must pursue this all-important task with preparation, knowledge and all necessary assistance.

In seeking the best guidance available in the process, school boards should not delegate to any one outside agency or individual the actual decision on the superintendent of schools. That decision must remain solely with the board.

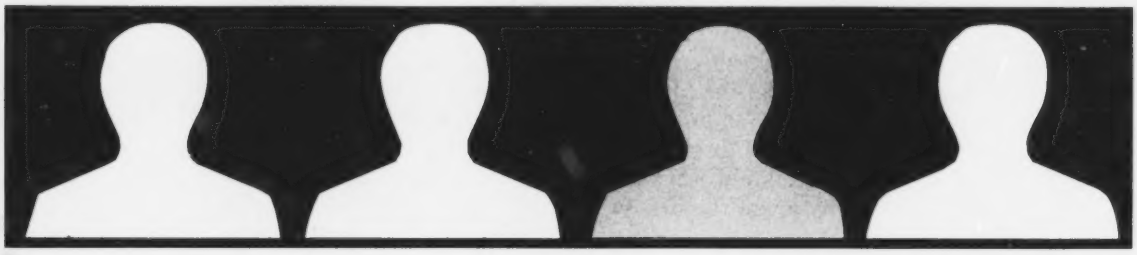
A qualified, experienced search consultant can guide and assist the board in many essential activities, such as: assessment of the educational climate in the district; plans for the proper involvement of staff and community; overview of the entire search process; development of criteria for the position; preparation of a vacancy announcement brochure; formulation of appropriate application form; interview form, rating scale, letters and communications; development of interviewing techniques and evaluation; indepth reference checking; and, ultimately, execution of all mechanics and routine procedures.

The following guidelines have evolved from the common experiences of more than 100 school boards in their successful selection of superintendents.

• **The board should assess the current educational climate in the school community.** This is an ideal occasion to re-examine the goals and priorities of the school district. With careful planning, the board can provide a forum for constructive input from staff, students, parents and community groups. The board can then determine whether it wishes to preserve "status quo" operation of the schools, or whether some changes should be made in the administration of the educational program.

After this initial assessment, the board can deal with some very essential questions: What kind of superintendent do we want?

A search process conducted properly, more than any other board action, will earn respect from staff, parents and community.



What are the management skills required for the position? Does the vacancy require a manager, an executive, an inspirational leader or a person with a combination of these traits? Is his or her style compatible with the operational style of the board? If the board acts as a committee of the whole, a dominating, controlling superintendent may be all right; whereas, if the board operates on a committee system, a different style is required of the chief school administrator.

• **The process must provide ample opportunity for total board involvement.** While a consultant can assist in the planning, leg work and mechanics, the board should review and make final determination on key elements in the procedure, including: criteria and compensation for the position; application; brochure; university placement bureaus and other media for advertising; identification of candidates for preliminary interviews; selection of finalist(s); field visit(s); and ultimately, the naming of the superintendent. Resulting from countless experiences of school boards, it is obvious that the more the board is involved, the more successful is the choice and the longer the tenure of the superintendent.

• **The board should limit staff role to suggestions, but reserve the final selection decision for the board.** A communication from the board to total staff, asking for individual employe suggestions as to qualifications for the superintendency, has proven very positive. Staff correspondence must be treated confidentially, since in many instances it will reveal very sensitive impressions. The board should review all staff responses prior to final approval of criteria for the position.

A second important communication from the board to staff should invite eligible staff members to apply and also solicit names of other persons to be invited to become candidates for the position. Even though the board usually receives responses from 20% or less of its employes, the entire staff will react very favorably to the opportunity to be involved in the process.

• **Board stationery should be used throughout the process.** It is the board which is communicating to the educational leadership profession and the best way to clearly emphasize this fact is through the use of appropriate official stationery. Studies have shown it is unwise for the departing superintendent to play any role in the selection of a successor. The use of existing school stationery, listing the name of the superintendent and other staff, encourages candidates to make inquiries of the departing administrator or other district staff. Since present staff members may be applicants for the position, it is quite natural that their responses to out-of-district candidates might be less than objective.

• **The mechanics of communication should be handled through an office, agency or address other than the school district central office.** In so doing, the efforts and time of the school district staff will not be diverted from normal responsibilities. The use of a non-school district address, such as the consultant, the board president or the agency conducting the search, increases assurance that the names of applicants and reference letters will remain confidential.

• **Although some board members might be predisposed to the selection of a current staff member, a comprehensive search brings objectivity and credibility to the board's final decision.** On the other hand, if a board is unanimous in their determination that a district staff member will be elevated to the position, a wide-ranging search is dishonest and wastes the time of board members and candidates. Research suggests that boards who select a superintendent from their own ranks want to continue their school systems with little or no change. Boards which select an "outsider" expect to see some changes in the educational program and the administration of the schools. Experience suggests that outsiders are more apt to effect desirable changes.

• **An announcement brochure or pamphlet should be developed which addresses items of importance to prospective candidates.** Among the information topics of interest to applicants are the following: the location of the school district and the quality of life in the community; educational programs, staff and students; facilities; finances; specific details on the position and how to apply. Brevity of descriptive material organized in an attractive format is the best guarantee that the brochure will be read. Additional descriptive material in the

form of sample newsletters, curriculum reports and other relevant data can be provided when the board has decided to interview specific candidates.

• **Applications should be evaluated against the criteria for the position.** It is desirable for the total board to have the opportunity to review all applications. Whether the board or a consultant appraises, attention must be focused on personal data, education experience, academic qualifications, quality of recommendations and any other information which would cause the board to react favorably or unfavorably to the candidate. A screening evaluation guide should be available to assist the board or the consultant in the process.

• **The interview must be a meaningful experience for the board and for the candidate.** Preliminary interviews are most productive if limited to approximately one hour. Generally, school boards schedule five to eight initial interviews on two successive evenings or one full day. If the interview is properly structured, it is possible for the board to form some important impressions of the candidate, including: personality traits, communication skills, executive qualities, knowledge and growth potential, insight and understanding, quality of educational experience, and attitude toward the interview. By using the same questions with all candidates, the board will be better able to judge the quality of responses by the candidates.

An interview form summary guide is available for use in both the preliminary interview and the final interview. Final interview questions should probe more deeply into the candidate's suitability for the position. Not more than two hours should be allocated for the occasion.

• **A reference check on the finalist(s) is an absolute necessity.** This step should be taken following the preliminary interview and prior to the final interview. The person conducting the reference check should contact at least five people who are familiar with the work of the candidate. Some of the references should be board members and several should be persons who are familiar with the candidate's performance in a position prior to the present. Input should be obtained on the finalist(s) strengths and weaknesses, impromptu ratings on such traits as administrative skills, personnel relations, communications, leadership, intellectual capacity, critical judgment, vitality and decisiveness.

A telephone reference rating form is available and is very helpful. Following the confidential reference check report by the board or the consultant, the board may discern a number of additional questions that should be asked in a final interview.

• **A visit to the finalist's school community is a very desirable practice.** Following the final interview, the board or a committee of the board should visit the finalist's school district. In nearly all instances, this visit corroborates the present judgment of the board in its choice. However, no fact significant to the can-

Sample task and time schedule

• Board assessment of educational climate	April
• Board review application, brochure and stationery	April
• Board selection college and university placement agencies, media for announcement	April
• Board letter to total staff, seeking input on desirable qualifications	April
• Board review letters from staff	April
• Board approve criteria for position	April
• Board "invitation to apply" letter to district staff	April
• Printing of criteria, application form, brochure, interview forms, rating scales	May
• Letters of announcement to national educational leaders, university placement bureaus, PSBA, AASA and others	May
• Receipt of credentials and applications	June/July
• Letters to candidates	June/July
• Screening of applications and credentials	July
• Board selection of candidates for preliminary interview	July
• Preliminary interviews with candidates	August
• Reference check/confidential report on finalists	August
• Finalist interview	August
• Board visit to finalist school district	August
• Board conference with successful candidate/spouse	August
• Formal appointment of superintendent and announcement	August
• Letters to persons interviewed	September
• Letters to all other applicants	September
• Return of credentials to university placement agencies	September
• Assumption of duties by superintendent	October

The selection of the chief school administrator sets the stage for the quality of teaching and learning. That person influences the destiny of all students in the district. The selection cannot be taken lightly or left to chance.

didate's past performance or anticipated future performance should be left uncovered. After the announcement of the selection of a superintendent, the board should not be greeted with surprise information about the newly appointed superintendent of schools.

• **Sufficient time should be allocated to ensure comprehensive planning and preparation, including proper initial communications, appropriate screening, interviewing, thorough reference checking and follow-up communications.** There is no quick way to fill a superintendent vacancy. From the time a vacancy occurs, and only if the board acts promptly, the process will take at least six months. However, exclusive of the interviews, the entire process should not require more than four special sessions of the board. Time and dollars spent to ensure a thorough search is the best investment a board will ever make. If conducted properly, the search process, more than any other board action, will earn board respect from staff, parents and the community.

• **If a consultant is retained, the board should clearly understand and agree on the role of the consultant.** This is very important, lest the consultant preempt the board decisions and lest the board abrogate its appropriate responsibilities in the process. At its initial meeting, the board should ask the consultant to present an overview of the process and describe the ways in which guidance and technical assistance could be provided to the board in the procedural planning and implementation. As a rule, the consultant should relieve the board of time-consuming mechanics, thus freeing the time and energy of the board for its decision-making functions.

In conclusion, the selection of the chief school administrator sets the stage for the quality of teaching and learning. In one way or another, that person influences the destiny of all students in the district. The selection cannot be taken lightly or left to chance.

While some board members could view superintendent selection as a perplexing task, it should be seen as the most challenging opportunity any board will ever face. The board must tackle the challenge with commitment and with whatever assistance it can muster.

A satisfying consequence will be genuine professional growth and development for each board member. Most significantly, the board will have made a lasting and positive impact on the district by selecting a top-notch educational leader for their schools.

Contributed by ***Dr. George E. Raab****, executive director emeritus of Bucks County Intermediate Unit and superintendent search consultant for PSBA. Reprinted from* ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *April 1984.*

Learning the ropes of school board leadership

The recent national reports on the condition of American public education seem to underscore effective local school management and leadership as the clearest components to bring about needed educational reform.

There seems, however, to be at least three areas that impede effective school board-school management relationships.

- Rapid **turnover of school board members** has created, in many cases, a local educational system that is sailing without a rudder, or at least appears to be following no identifiable direction.
- The rapid **growth of collective bargaining created adversarial relationships** requiring the leadership team to focus more attention on employe relations than quality education.
- A combination of both of the foregoing has sometimes caused a **lack of understanding and respect** for the separate roles and responsibilities of elected school boards and their administrative team.

Such confusion — about roles and responsibilities — is perhaps the greatest deterrent to more harmonious and effective educational leadership. Once identified, however, it can be the easiest to correct.

Based on PSBA's research and hundreds of customized workshops for local school districts, school boards and the management team can provide effective leadership if their respective roles are clearly identified, understood and respected by each member of the team.

While management and educational leadership are often intertwined, **management** seems to be the process of accomplishing goals or objectives that are more easily measured and recognized.

Leadership, on the other hand, is the ability to inspire others to work together as a team to achieve common goals. Effective leaders recognize that no one person can do it all alone and others must be inspired to follow or to be a part of the team.

Some believe that leadership is a quality you are born with, an inherent quality. Others feel that leadership is learned, practiced and developed and can be taught. While experts and practitioners may argue what leadership is or if it can be taught, many agree on several of the qualities of leadership: integrity, perseverance, faith in others, ability to plan, vision, initiative and courage. These qualities must manifest themselves in sufficient amounts for the school management team to function effectively.

With these thoughts in mind, there are several guidelines and statements needed in the review process. These thoughts are printed to re-emphasize the notion that our system of local governance, while not perfect, is still the best system to provide the basis of effective leadership and ultimately provide a quality learning environment for our children and community.

A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities is necessary for effective school board-school management relationships.

Why are school boards necessary?

- Local school boards keep the public schools in the possession of the public rather than central government, professional educators and private corporations. Our schools began as local institutions and school boards keep them that way.
- School boards are a check on a propriety interest of the professionals and thus carry out the American precept of checks and balances.
- School boards afford a means for

bringing together varying points of view in formulating school policy.

• School boards make possible, but do not guarantee, the direct exercise of the people's will in regard to public education. School boards are expected to be better informed and make decisions in the best interest of the community.

• School boards are trustees of our heritage and the position of school director therefore has gained recognition as a community's highest honor. The purpose of education is to help people adjust to, perpetuate, and improve our way of life.

What are the chief responsibilities of the school board?

• Through the staff, to develop and constantly improve the educational program.

• To provide adequate and effective personnel for staffing the school program.

• To provide and maintain educationally efficient school facilities.

• To secure adequate financial resources.

• To maintain two-way communications between the board and students, employes, parents, taxpayers and the community at-large.

• To select the chief executive officer and work harmoniously and honestly with him.

How do school board members differ?

• School board members differ in personality, attitudes, purposes and methods of working with people. They come from all walks of life with different talents.

• School board members are unique, as every human being on the face of the earth is an individual.

• Some school board members know how to work with people; some do not.

• Some have pet peeves or prejudices

10 commandments for better communication for school officials

1. Thou shalt always remember that the public schools are public. They do not belong to any school official.

2. Thou shalt encourage every school official to treat people as if they were customers. If the voucher system were initiated, would enough people choose your school to justify keeping it open?

3. Thou shalt realize that a sound communication program is more than what most people consider public relations.

4. Thou shalt recognize the importance of communication in meeting key challenges. For example, communication components play a major role in reducing vandalism, in gaining support for financial needs and in effecting innovations.

5. Thou shalt always use and insist that all school officials use language that lay citizens can understand.

6. Thou shalt emphasize the importance of communication by adopting a written communication policy.

7. Thou shalt involve the community and staff in identifying communication accomplishments, challenges and needs and in setting goals for the schools.

8. Thou shalt offer inservice programs for all officials and employes. (Most school administrators and teachers are inadequately prepared for communication responsibilities. Secretaries and custodians are often the main source of taxpayers' impressions of the schools.)

9. Thou shalt stop and think about the most important ingredients that make a good school. Invariably when this kind of thinking takes place, a better commitment is made to improve communication. This means establishing improved communication as a goal — one that administrators know they will be evaluated on.

10. Thou shalt be sure to make someone responsible for communication leadership in the district. (Without this kind of leadership, too often the effort fails to receive the impetus needed.)

when they come on the board; others are open minded and ready to learn.

- Some are ready to believe every complaint they hear; others wait judiciously for the evidence.
- Some are passive; others are aggressive.
- Some seek publicity for personal attention; others are on the board only to serve the schools.
- Some are courageous and will stand up for the program of the schools; others are highly sensitive to criticism and will give in or compromise at the least pressure.
- Some will take time to represent the schools to the public and explain the program; others are too busy to devote the time.
- Some see the superintendent as a necessary evil; others see him as a partner working with the board as its chief executive officer.

Role of the superintendent and administrative staff

- The staff is employed by the board to administer and operate the schools under its direction.

- The superintendent is a partner of the board. No policy should be adopted without hearing his recommendations. The superintendent should be at all board meetings, except possibly those electing and fixing the salary of the superintendent.
- The superintendent is the leader of the staff.
- The superintendent is the connecting link between the board and all other school employes.
- The superintendent and administrative staff must strive to utilize the resources of the board, the teachers and the community in effecting changes in educational policy.
- The superintendent and staff must know the community. The superintendent must have the ability to work with community leaders to obtain their confidence and support.
- The superintendent and staff must interpret the needs of the school system.
- The superintendent and staff must interpret board decisions to school personnel and the community.
- The superintendent must work with or hire central staff who have unique skills and abilities to perform the many services needed in fulfilling the tasks of the school district.
- The superintendent of schools is employed by the board of education as its executive agent — a professional adviser to the board, the chief administrator of the schools, the leader of the staff and the focal point of responsibility in the district.
- The building principals are the educational leaders in the various schools. Their position is to inspire their staff to provide the best education possible consistent with overall school district policy. They must share responsibilities for selection, improvement and dismissal of personnel. They should be a professional resource to the board and be able to identify the resources necessary to aid teaching and learning in their respective schools.

School boards and the management team can provide effective leadership if their respective roles are clearly identified, understood and respected by each member of the team.

What are the basic requirements for successful school boardmanship?

- Recognition that inservice training and self-study are essential to effective boardmanship.
- Acceptance of the principle of team work, board unity and subordination of self-interest.
- Understanding the executive function delegated to the superintendent and administrative staff; willingness to support board administrative policies.
- Demonstrating initiative, informed leadership and insight in board planning and policy making.
- Effectiveness in professional relationships.
- Effectiveness in staff and group relationships.
- Courage for the good of the schools in spite of pressure and influences.

Leadership responsibilities of school board members

1. Leadership qualities: integrity, perseverance, faith, ability to plan, vision, initiative, courage.
2. Work for harmony and a "team spirit" within the board itself.
3. Establish clearly and simply written board policies in cooperation with all concerned; make them available to the school staff and community, and keep them up to date.
4. Work for a curriculum which adequately meets the present day needs of youth and adults in the school community.
5. Move steadily toward adequate housing and facilities for the school population, present and future.
6. Stand for adequate financial support based on an equitable distribution of the burden and stand for efficient use of financial resources.
7. Encourage cooperative relationships between the school system and the community so that all people have all the important facts about the school.
8. Be alert to conditions and influences in the school district which have in them seeds of controversy and initiate plans to deal with them.
9. Work unceasingly to advance the quality and effectiveness of the educational program.
10. Encourage inservice training for the board and the staff. Establish policy and budget accordingly for board learning opportunities.

Earmarks of a successful management team

- Each member of the team must know his role and respect the role of each of the team members.
- Each member must respect the right of others to have a differing point of view.
- Each member must be working toward commonly accepted goals. (Performance by objectives, valuing job positions, management by objectives, etc.).
- Forums must be provided for dialogue and objective dissent, but once a decision is reached, uniform action is demanded.
- Responsibilities imply an inherent privilege — that of participation in the evolution of a decision leading to a responsibility.
- All team members must fully understand that various people are at various stages in their understanding of a new idea.
- Each member must assign a priority to the use of his time in the achievement of board goals.

Contributed by ***Dorsey E. Enck****, director of educational management services of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, and* ***Dr. George E. Raab****, executive director emeritus of Bucks County Intermediate Unit and consultant for the PSBA superintendent search program.*

18 tenets of the effective board-administrative management team

Board members should:

1. Recognize their function as being legislative and judicial, and respect the executive function of the superintendent.
2. Attend all board meetings and assure that the board does not meet in the absence of the superintendent except when his terms of employment are under discussion.
3. Recognize that authority to act rests with the entire board or a legally constituted quorum of the board and that business may be transacted only in official meetings. To refrain from making commitments to individuals or organizations as an individual member of the board.
4. Support the superintendent as the executor of board policies.

5. Listen courteously to parents with questions and complaints, referring them to an appropriate member of the school staff in accordance with policies of the school.
6. Refer personal requests and criticism by school staff directly to the appropriate administrative officer in accordance with the policies of the school.
7. Keep the superintendent and fellow members of the board advised of community reaction to school policies.

8. Submit items to be placed on the board meeting agenda in ample time so the superintendent may assemble information bearing upon the subject and according to locally adopted policy.
9. Encourage and support the superintendent to consult with his staff and community to seek opinions and recommendations for board consideration.
10. Require that meetings of the board be conducted on the basis of a planned agenda prepared by the superintendent in accordance with board policies and be made available to board members together with pertinent information prior to the board meetings.

Superintendents should:

1. Recognize his function as being executive and respect the legislative and judicial functions of the board.
2. Attend all board meetings except when his terms of employment are under discussion.

3. Interpret official actions of the board to school employes and community groups in a faithful, accurate and objective manner and not make any commitments to individuals or organizations outside the context of adopted school policy.

4. Faithfully and objectively administer the policies of the school as adopted by the board.
5. Establish a program of school-community relations leading to open two-way communications between the district and all parties.
6. Provide written grievance procedures for school staff and assure an effective means of communication among staff, board and superintendent.
7. Keep the board continuously, adequately and objectively informed concerning the school program, curriculum and problems — current and anticipated.
8. Accept items to be placed on the board meeting agenda from members of the board, and others, and gather pertinent information relative to the items on the agenda to be presented to the board.
9. Formulate, with members of the school staff, board and community, recommendations to be made to the board.

10. Prepare for all board meetings, in cooperation with appropriate board officers, an agenda and supporting materials to be distributed to board members in ample time prior to board meetings.

11. Develop a clear set of policies, re: such items as size of school, class size, assigned responsibilities, budget preparation and format, staffing, admission policies, use of school property, public relations, suspension or dismissal, tuition collections, etc.

12. Require that the administrative rules and regulations be in harmony with school policy.

13. Delegate full executive responsibility to the superintendent for establishing and operating a total school program of acceptable standards.

14. Assume responsibility for adopting fiscal policies that will allow the superintendent to operate a total school program of acceptable standards.

15. Adopt policies that will allow the superintendent and his designated staff to keep abreast of contemporary developments in education through conference attendance, inservice workshops and consultant services.

16. Provide at least three months notice to the superintendent prior to end of contract whether or not his contract is to be renewed.

17. Assure that the superintendent has the opportunity to meet with the board in any final determination of his termination of services.

18. Act on the selection, promotion, demotion or dismissal of professional school personnel only after submission of a specific recommendation by the superintendent.

11. Carry out board policies and be held accountable for them. Assist the board in maintaining focus on policy matters and recommend and evaluate policy at all times.

12. Present to the board for its advice, council and approval, administrative rules and regulations implementing the policies of the board.

13. Accept full executive responsibility for establishing and operating a total school program of acceptable standards.

14. Assume responsibility for presenting to the board responsible and detailed fiscal plans, both current and future, to assure the smooth operation of an acceptable total school program.

15. Advise the board of programs designed to keep the superintendent and his staff abreast of contemporary developments in education, through conference attendance, inservice workshops and consultant services.

16. Provide at least three months notice prior to the end of contract whether or not he plans to renew his contract.

17. Provide the board with an adequate explanation if he decides not to renew his contract.

18. Present to the board recommendations for selection, promotion, demotion or dismissal of professional school personnel only after ascertaining that each person recommended for selection or promotion is the best qualified, in all ways, for the position as described.

The board of education and the superintendent

Two basic principles underlie the United States' system of public education:

> The control of public education in the United States is vested in the legislatures of the states. Each state operates its system through locally elected boards of education composed of laypeople.
>
> Education is a complex process requiring professional knowledge. The organization and operation of a school system requires the coordination of the efforts of many people trained in an astonishing number of specialties.

The point at which these two principles interact to provide the special American mix for public education is when an elected board of education meets with and acts upon the recommendations of its superintendent of schools.

No board, by itself, no matter how conscientious and hard-working, can ensure an effective school system. Quality education must be provided by professionals especially trained for this complex task. No superintendent of schools and faculty alone can provide quality education. The goals of the schools, the funds necessary for the effort, and the final determination of guiding policies are all controlled by the board of education. If its members are limited in vision, the professionals must function within these limitations.

Professional adviser

The superintendent serves as the professional adviser to the board and as its chief executive officer. The superintendent is responsible for assisting the board in making wise decisions, and should participate fully in discussion of all issues before the board, with the exception of those affecting his own employment. The superintendent, of course, has no vote. Once decisions have been made by the board, the superintendent is responsible for putting each decision into operation.

Superintendents are responsible for furnishing reports and information to the board — both upon request and upon their own initiative — in order to keep members thoroughly informed about the condition of public education in their community, the problems ahead, and the action underway to meet the problems.

A great deal of the activity of boards of school directors in effective school districts consists of action upon specific recommendations by the superintendent. The recommendation process is more than simply conveying preferences to the board. When action by the board is needed, the superintendent should first clarify the issue, then outline the various alternatives open to the board. The superintendent should ensure that members understand the costs involved and probable educational consequences of each of the alternatives. Finally, the superintendent should make a clear, specific recommendation as to which of the alternatives is preferable, and why.

No board, by itself, no matter how conscientious and hard-working, can ensure an effective school system. Quality education must be provided by trained professionals.

Superintendent's responsibilities

Certain responsibilities of the superintendent are fixed by statute (Section 1081 of the Public School Code):

- Attend all meetings of the board.
- Visit schools under the jurisdiction of the board.
- Note courses and methods of instruction.
- Give direction relative to the art and methods of teaching.
- Report deficiencies to the board.
- Ensure equality among the schools.
- Inspect the buildings and grounds.

In addition, certain specific responsibilities are generally accepted as good practice. These include:

- Nominate to the board the employment, promotion or dismissal of all employes.
- Assign personnel and establish their duties.
- Prepare and distribute a written agenda in advance of meetings of the board.
- Prepare and recommend an annual budget for adoption by the board.

Relationship with board

Qualities of judgment, human relationships, ethics, emotional stability, organizational competence, initiative and commitment demonstrated by the superintendent are important and will be constantly under appraisal by members of the board. A good board and a competent professional superintendent will both desire and profit from mutual, honest, straightforward understandings.

While the personal relationship between the superintendent and individual members of the board sometimes may be strained, the important appraisal must be of the relationship between the board as a corporate entity and the superintendent as its chief agent. Some boards have found that scheduling a private session, at which both the board and the superintendent speak frankly to each other about their working relationships and problems, is a helpful device.

Other boards meet annually with the superintendent to agree upon performance goals for the coming year, and to review the progress toward reaching goals previously established. In this fashion, the performance of the superintendent is evaluated in terms of the extent to which mutually agreed-upon goals were met. Regardless of the specific form used, a scheduled, planned method for assuring that the superintendent is aware of the board's view of his contributions, and the areas in which the board wishes to see change, will be of a great deal of mutual benefit.

The establishment of written policy is the primary means by which boards fulfill their functions. Once policy has been established, good management practice requires that the superintendent have full authority to make operating decisions and carry on the day-to-day operation of the schools consistent with the policy.

Policy making is a never-ending process. The superintendent should alert the board to new developments for which no adequate policy guidelines exist, and should recommend policy that will be adequate to meet the changing circumstances. Existing policy should be tested against specific cases to ensure that the policy and its interpretation are consistent with the board's desire.

Administrative details

If the board insists upon deciding specific cases, even though sometimes there may seem to be important reasons for doing so, it will emasculate the administration of the schools and severely damage the effective operation of the district. Administration is hampered when individuals or groups are led to believe that certain specific cases will be especially considered by the board. Soon, everyone feels that his case has not been finally determined until the board passes upon it. The board becomes en-

A good board and a competent professional superintendent will both desire and profit from mutual, honest, straightforward understandings.

meshed in the details of administration with obvious disadvantages to all concerned.

This is especially true with regard to the negotiations of the collective bargaining agreement. It is essential that adequate administrative input be received before board commitment is made to any provision which impacts on administrative decision making. The superintendent and staff cannot be held accountable for school operations that have been subjected to bargaining agreement controls over which the superintendent has no jurisdiction or freedom of action.

Delegating responsibility

Much responsibility must be delegated in any organization. While superintendents can hardly be held accountable for the actions of every individual, they should be held accountable for the kind of delegation that takes place.

Several questions can be asked:

- Was the delegation clearly understood?
- Was the person to whom responsibility was delegated reasonably qualified to perform the task?
- Did the subordinate receive adequate authority to match the responsibility delegated?

Boards expect a lot from their superintendents, and rightly so. In order for them to produce, however, they have a right:

- To be able to speak confidentially to the board without hesitation.
- To receive backing by the board when policies are implemented.
- To receive support against unwarranted criticism.
- To receive periodic open, honest appraisal of their work.

Excerpted from ***To Use These Talents,*** *© by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1969 and 1973, written by* ***Dr. Robert L. Walter,*** *Temple University.*

111

Policy making, the board and the superintendent

A special PSBA statewide commission, convened in 1977 and composed of 32 school directors, district superintendents and intermediate unit executive directors, examined and provided input into the process of school board policy making as it related to the roles of the board and the superintendent.

In reviewing the relationship, the commission members agreed upon three comprehensive statements:

- The role and function of a school board and a superintendent need to be well understood.
- The concept of effective school management must be the mutual objective of the school board and the superintendent.
- Change is inevitable in the operation of public schools. Therefore, an effective process of evaluation of such change is imperative.

Concerns

Education in a democratic society must provide for public control of the educational enterprise and, at the same time, provide for the use of available technical knowledge. In America, this concept of the educational design has been expressed through the local lay school board and its executive officer, the professional superintendent of schools. Each has important functions to perform.

The board in representing the public sets the general direction in which the schools are to be operated. The superintendent provides the technical and professional competence to implement board directives and to manage the schools. The extent to which the board and the superintendent discharge their proper functions, or infringe on each other's responsibilities, impacts directly on the effectiveness of the school program.

A board and a superintendent, sincerely interested in providing effective educational leadership, will continuously assess their way of working together. Their concerns will include a proper division of responsibility as to how each may serve the educational enterprise efficiently and effectively.

The commission agreed that most of the concerns that arise regarding the effective relationship of a board of school directors and superintendent relate directly to these three basic principles:

- The **role and function** of the board and superintendent.
- The **planning process** for educational programs, services and community needs.
- The operational functions of the public school system flowing out of **policy development and implementation.**

Role and function

School directors must remember that their legal authority and power is only in full force and effect when they are legally convened in public board business. The

Education in a democratic society provides for public control of the educational enterprise and for use of available technical knowledge.

general public may still view (and rightfully so) the board member as a decision maker and policy setter during private or other individual public appearances. However, school directors must remain aware of the fact that their comments do not reflect **board action** until such time as the board meets and acts on such matters.

Planning

Planning is the vehicle through which the board should continue to focus its direction and attention. Boards that fail to plan properly for the future are more likely to get caught up with the day-to-day administration of the district which immediately tends to strain board-superintendent relationships. A board that lacks policy direction is more likely to find itself acting in crisis situations. Decision making becomes extremely difficult when pressure situations are constantly treated under trying circumstances.

Policy guidance

Within the area of policy development a clear understanding of the role and function of the board and superintendent should be communicated. An organizational structure, denoting the manner in which the system functions, will help to provide a better understanding of the roles of the two parties and a strengthening of the board-superintendent relationship. Such a structure should include job or position descriptions which clearly identify the responsibilities and authorities of the board and the administrative staff.

The commission identified seven of the most typical situations that have the greatest potential for a breakdown in sound board-superintendent relationships.

1. Failure to understand the difference between policy and administrative procedures. Each party must make a determined effort to understand and respect the position of the other and agree where policy ends and procedures begin.

2. Failure to keep students the center of the decision-making process. In seeking to define their relationships, both parties must not lose sight of their main responsibilities — students.

3. Failure to keep each other informed. Surprises can be a deadly action on the part of either party. Nothing disturbs the board-superintendent relationship more than to find that either party has withheld information on a matter which the other considers important.

4. Failure to be open-minded. Both parties need to be tolerant. Both the board and the superintendent have a "right to be wrong in working toward established goals." Learning from past experiences will lead to improved decision making.

5. Failure to grow intellectually. Either party which refuses to grow in wisdom and knowledge, or participate in continuing inservice training, invites the mistrust of the other. School board service is not a "once-a-month-and-done" position. The responsibilities of the superintendent and other management level positions do not end at the office or school door.

6. Failure to exert leadership. The superintendent must be willing to make recommendations when the board is faced with difficult decisions. The board must be willing to exercise leadership in the community. Both must be willing to explain and support the decisions they have made.

7. Failure to assume decision-making role. Though some boards recognize their roles, they choose to leave the decision making to the superintendent. Superintendents should not be forced to initiate policy by default.

Development of solutions

The commission in its review and research found that four areas need continuous attention by boards and superintendents: establishing goals and objectives; inservice training; communication; and evaluation of results.

Goals and objectives are best established annually and are eventually encoded in written policies, which communicate the

Four areas need continuous attention by boards and superintendents: goals and objectives; inservice training; communication; evaluation.

goals and objectives, and through administrative rules, which interpret and apply these policies.

Inservice training programs that are attended by the superintendent and the board are crucial to fostering positive board-superintendent dialogue.

Just as the professional staff is expected to remain competent in their field of expertise, inservice education is also expected of school directors, superintendents and other administrative staff. Being responsible for the operation of a public school system — and for the future of its students — is a challenging task and requires a broad base of knowledge and information in order to make intelligent decisions.

School districts are often one of the largest employers in a given area. Multi-million dollar budgets need informed, responsible decision makers. Inservice education and training can provide the understanding needed to ensure proper management and control of the educational system and the public's tax dollars.

Targeted **communication** programs, involving the staff and community, must be managed with the same expertise that other programs require. Communication is a cooperative effort between the board and school management that should set in motion the necessary framework, or operating climate, which reflects to the public: "These are your schools and we're working to make them better."

Such an attitude will strengthen the ties between school officials and the community at large and, ultimately, the working relationship between the superintendent and the board of school directors.

Evaluation of performance, either program or individual, should be an ongoing process. Evaluation should be encouraged and standards set in accordance with established goals and objectives.

The board also needs to critically assess its own performance in determining the direction given to the system.

Excerpted from the special report of the PSBA Commission to Strengthen the Working Relationship of School Boards and Superintendents, October 1977.

CHAPTER 6

119 Five myths and misconceptions about Act 195

121 Conflict in bargaining is not likely to disappear

125 Effective employe relations reduce conflict in the bargaining process

129 Strikes require special attention

Five myths and misconceptions about Act 195

As newly elected school directors begin their term of office, they will be faced with learning a lot about the many aspects of the operation of our public schools. This article is intended to put into perspective five common misconceptions and myths about the Public Employe Relations Act (Act 195 of 1970.) This act affects every district in the state because literally all districts negotiate with one or more collective bargaining units, or unions.

1 **Only teachers are covered by Act 195.** This is a common misconception. All other school employes, such as bus drivers, cafeteria workers, secretaries and crossing guards have similar rights. However, many of these employes have chosen not to organize at this time.

2 **Act 195 is an education law.** Act 195 was never intended to determine the quality, quantity or form of the public school system. Act 195 was enacted to give public employes the right to bargain for their "wages, hours, terms and conditions of employment." For example, few people predicted the inevitable conflict between the 180-day rule for students in the School Code and the teachers' ability to cause calendars to be rescheduled to ensure 180 days of employment following a strike.

3 **Everything is bargainable.** Contrary to union beliefs and demands, there are numerous managerial rights that local school officials still have. Programs, curriculum design, textbooks, supplies and equipment purchased, extracurricular offerings, discipline codes and personnel evaluation are areas the board does not have to put in a contract.

4 **Collective bargaining requires individual board participation.** Although many elected school directors have willingly given of their personal time to serve on a school negotiating team or as chief negotiator, it is not a requirement of law. In fact, very few elected officials have the expertise in negotiations theory and practice nor do they have the time required of this activity.

As turnover of elected directors produces less continuity of board service, it becomes increasingly apparent that school boards will need to seek competent, qualified persons familiar with the complexities of the negotiating process.

5 **Public understanding of the collective bargaining process is unnecessary.** More than ever before, the public needs greater understanding and clarification of the bargaining process, and of school strikes, if community involvement is to be a positive influence. Many school boards have found themselves faced with a community needing more information about labor concerns as portrayed by teacher unions during a critical phase of negotiations — usually during a strike. School boards should have a positive information program.

Act 195 affects every district because all negotiate with one or more collective bargaining units.

Conflict in bargaining is not likely to disappear

Conflict in bargaining is not likely to disappear. There are historical and cultural aspects of conflict in employer-employe relationships and in collective bargaining relationships. It is important to identify, understand and deal effectively with such conflict.

Whenever authority relationships exist, conflict is inherent since differences over the scope and exercise of authority, power and control are likely to arise.

In the mid-1700s, local markets expanded and skilled craft workers began to experience competition in their market area. As a result of this competition, Philadelphia journeymen shoemakers established the first labor union of skilled craft workers in 1792 to achieve greater voice in employment matters and to protect their common interests. Unionization was seen as a viable means to deal with conflict between employer and employe.

Basic cultural and social differences existed in the employment relationship prior to industrialization. These differences broadened with the dawn of the industrial era and the immigration of thousands of Irish, Polish and other eastern Europeans to fill the demand for unskilled labor. On the one hand, owners of the factories were wealthy, did not reside near the factory and were non-Catholic. On the other hand, the immigrants were poor, new to the country, Catholic and lived in the factory community. Religious, social, cultural and economic differences affected the employment relationship.

As a result of the workers' movement toward labor unions, the conflict within that relationship expanded. However, this is a limited conflict since employers and employes are interdependent; neither can survive and achieve its goals without the survival and goal-attainment of the other. The conflict exists only as a subset of issues: a clash of interests between the employe seeking job and income security and improvement, and the employer seeking to promote efficiency and organizational and administrative effectiveness.

While the early history of labor management models mentioned above appears simple in explanation, that same model applied to public sector negotiations and public education labor theory is not as clearly separated.

Nevertheless, the conflict that exists between employer and employe within the public sector — that surrounds collective bargaining within the educational labor relations context — is the same one that spurned unionization of the labor force in the private sector. This same conflict motivated the tremendous growth public sector labor unions experienced in the 1960s and 1970s.

The conflict that exists within the educational labor-management relationship is multifaceted. It will vary by its source and can be motivated by:

- Economic considerations (compensation, benefits).
- Matters of principle (management and association rights).
- Personal reasons (discharge).
- Institutional rights (security of union).
- Political desires (union, school district, school board, community).
- Legal requirements (School Code).

Resolution or diffusion of conflict that arises through the collective bargaining process depends upon the disposition of the parties toward peaceful and positive labor-

The source of conflict in the bargaining process is steeped in the historical, cultural and economic differences that traditionally exist between employer and employe.

management relations. Positive disposition has traditionally been difficult to achieve and maintain. Surveys conducted by the National School Boards Association cite collective bargaining as the most frequently identified area of frustration, distaste and concern for school board members.

Generally, there are three options available that provide a way to react to and deal with conflict that occurs naturally in the employment-collective bargaining relationship.

- **Buy right into the conflict — fight right back.** This alternative tends to escalate the conflict, creating rigid positions and perceptions. The conflict consumes and enmeshes both parties and the stage is set for conflict to surface in many other areas. A major problem associated with this alternative, once the conflict has escalated, is that it is difficult and time consuming to return to the process of collective bargaining to resolve the conflict.
- **Ignore the conflict — pretend it does not exist.** This option fails to appreciate the differences and their intensity, the source of the conflict. As a result, poor decision making takes place and too much power, authority and control are lost.
- **Acknowledge and accept the existence of conflict.** The ability to respect and appreciate the source of the conflict enables a school board to avoid becoming enmeshed within the conflict, to work with it and to concentrate on interests and needs rather than people and positions. Flexibility and positive disposition are the keys to effective use of this option. By not becoming rigid and worried about positions and people, conflict can be diffused and worked through.

When the parties become enmeshed in the conflict, it escalates, issues become clouded, positions and perceptions become rigid, decision making becomes overly emotional and the process falls apart. However, if the existence of the conflict is acknowledged and accepted for what it is and the conflict (people and positions) does not become the means to the end through the bargaining process, the conflict is diffused. A stable and controllable relationship is created that keeps the collective bargaining process on a solid and effective foundation.

A key to maintaining a positive disposition, flexibility and acceptance of the conflict that exists in bargaining is to remember that the collective bargaining process is not the source of the conflict. The source is steeped in the historical, cultural and economic differences that traditionally exist between employer and employe.

School districts have long sought alternative styles of bargaining with the intent

The simplist step to diffuse conflict between employer and employe is to remain positive in all employment relationships, whether traditionally perceived as positive or negative; you are dealing with the same employes.

to eliminate conflict from the bargaining process. Most often touted as nonconflictive alternatives are early bird agreements, informal negotiations and the "win-win" process. These alternatives only restructure conflict or at best reduce the degree of conflict. Remember, bargaining is not the source of the conflict, only the vehicle used to resolve it.

Care must be taken when considering an alternative. Evaluate the goals and expectations to be derived from the alternative against the possible pitfalls. Disposition, preparation, flexibility, goals and strategies are important in any method of collective bargaining. Alternatives to traditional bargaining may eliminate some of these features.

There are some concrete steps that can be taken to diffuse conflict between employer and employe. The simplest is for the employer to be consistent in the treatment of employes. Remain positive in all employment relationships, whether traditionally perceived as positive or negative; you are dealing with the same employes.

Sound personnel practices will create an atmosphere that promotes mutual respect and will diffuse conflict. The efficient operation of a school district, coupled with effective management of employes, is crucial to working through and diffusing employer-employe conflict within the employment-collective bargaining relationship.

Contributed by ***Dennis J. Guth,*** *former PSBA educational management services consultant. Reprinted from* ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *October 1985.*

Effective employe relations reduce conflict in the bargaining process

Good personnel practices can help make conflict between employe and employer more manageable. Conflict is inevitable — an inherent, natural process resulting from pluralistic interests in an authority-subordinate relationship. Appropriate personnel practices center around efficient use, motivation and recognition of employes. Here are nine standard personnel practices.

Hiring — A district that places little emphasis on hiring will not attract a job candidate who has the necessary abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and goals to fill a position. Hiring a candidate is more than filling a slot. It is adding to the educational team an employe with the qualities to serve the goals of the district and the educational process.

The process begins with the determination of needs, present and future. Long-range anticipation of staffing needs gives ample time to recruit and select a new employe, restructure or retrain staff and, in some cases, reduce staff.

A thorough process of recruitment, screening, interviewing and selection will lead to more suitable choices who will likely succeed within the framework of district goals, objectives and expectations. The hiring procedure should include principals. Central office may carry the responsibility of recruiting and screening, but the principal needs to be included in the interviewing and evaluation leading to the recommendation of a candidate.

Staff Development — While important to the renewal or rejuvenation of an employe or group of employes, staff development is not limited to these purposes. It can also take who and what is good and make them better.

All employes have potential for growth and development and are only limited by personal ability and opportunity. A sound staff development plan will realize these underdeveloped or unutilized possibilities. This can only be a benefit for the employer, employe and students. It may well be that the new leadership for the district will evolve through this plan.

Staff development can be attained through job enrichment, job enlargement or any other method that stretches the employe beyond the expected and routine. This will result in a greater scope of personal achievement, more challenging and responsible work and will increase task efficiency and employe satisfaction.

Supervision — Supervision should be substantial without being stifling. An administrator needs to be motivating, communicative and supportive. In doing so, a sense of proficiency, creativity and personal development will be encouraged.

A good supervisor will allow employes to take initiatives, to learn and grow, will give credit for good performance, and will avoid the tendency to become uncomfortable and inflexible when employes have conflicting ideas.

The temptation to over-supervise, discourage creativity and stress failure must be counteracted by a positive approach of encouragement and plaudits.

Evaluation — Thorough and effective evaluations have positive characteristics and benefits for the district. Evaluations should not be looked upon strictly as a legal requirement to be satisfied. They have a developmental as well as an appraisal function. Conducted properly and positively, an

Here are nine standard personnel practices for efficient use, motivation and recognition of employes.

Communication is simply the exchange of thoughts, ideas, attitudes, feelings, expectations. The exchange of thoughts should be foremost in the successful pursuit of district goals and individual satisfaction.

evaluation will encourage or improve the exemplary or may improve and salvage the unsatisfactory.

An unsatisfactory evaluation does not have to be a negative experience if the appraiser and appraisee can use the experience to motivate and improve the performance of the employe.

Properly handled, an evaluation should develop a rapport to carry beyond it to other aspects of employer-employe relationships.

Remember, evaluation is a positive, cooperative and continuing process for the purpose of improving and maintaining the quality of education.

Recognition — Everyone likes to be recognized by others for achievements. The satisfaction of accomplishment is always more satisfactory when shared by others. Employes are more likely to put forth extra time and effort if that time and effort are recognized.

Recognition can take many forms — from a simple "thank you" from an administrator to a tangible award such as cash, service pins and certificates. The form is generally dictated by the accomplishment.

Employes do not want to exist in a vacuum, not knowing the quality of their performance. Recognition can eliminate this vacuum while bridging a relationship between individuals and employers.

One caution: Praise is another form of evaluation and may make the employe uncomfortable. The method of delivering the recognition is crucial.

Communication — Communication is a term that has been overused, overdefined and undercomprehended. It has been referred to as an art, or as a network that bands all together, while it is simply the exchange of thoughts. These thoughts may take the form of information, ideas, attitudes, feelings, expectations or simply personal conversation. The exchange of thoughts should be foremost in the successful pursuit of district goals and individual satisfaction.

An employe assuming a position in a district needs to know the district's educational philosophy, requirements of the position, growth requirements, fellow employes and the community. The district must know the employe's capabilities, hopes, ideas and problems. Open, flexible, two-way communication allows for all needs to be met.

Communication can take many forms: verbal exchange, memo, suggestion system, employe survey, conferences and retreats, handbooks, job descriptions, procedure manuals, policy, etc.

It's important to remember — don't talk about talking, just talk.

Contract Administration — For those employes under a collective bargaining agreement, proper contract administration is important. The contract may not be popular and its contents may be irritating and restrictive, but it must be honored.

The management team must be familiar with the entire contract, particularly those areas of direct responsibility. Interpretation of the contract must be consistent throughout the district.

In order to accomplish familiarity and consistency, briefings should be held for the management team prior to implementation. Changes from the previous agreement should be highlighted, noting any change in prior practices.

Follow-up briefings should be held periodically to discuss any inconsistencies in interpretation and any grievances. This will

also prepare the district for subsequent negotiations.

Every member of the management team should have a copy of the agreement.

Efficient Management — The key to the success of any organization, efficient management, is also a key to good personnel practices. If management is floundering, the relationship with employes will reflect that situation.

Efficiency begins with a commitment; a willingness to listen, learn, and grow; an ability to make sound decisions; and the demonstration of leadership.

Leadership is crucial to influencing behavior, attitudes and employer-employe relationships. Weak leadership will create confusion and cause for concern, opening the door to union interference and heightened conflict.

Policy — Policy is the backbone of any organization. Without a blueprint for operating, indecision and poor decisions become the norm.

Giving direction and consistency to the operation of a district, policy clarifies roles and authority, while eliminating misunderstandings. Policy helps the board look businesslike and gives its actions added credence. Clearly written policies indicate sound judgment, careful planning and efficiency.

The benefit of implementing these personnel practices will far outweigh any costs, large or small. The conflict between employe and employer will not be eliminated, but may be greatly reduced.

Today's employe is not satisfied only by salary and fringe benefits, but more so by recognition and fulfillment.

Contributed by ***J. Curtis Rose,*** *PSBA assistant director of educational management services. Reprinted from* ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *October 1985.*

Strikes require special attention

Effective management can only take place with planned, systematic communication programs. You cannot separate the two.

You will not be credible to the news media or the public if you choose only to communicate when you're in trouble. Therefore school officials have a mandate to communicate on a regular basis.

Communicating during crises (snow storms, floods, etc.) is really no different than at other times during the school year. Except you will be severely tested during a school strike.

Crisis communication requires objectivity and truthfulness. Anything less by the board and administration is an abandonment of responsibility to the students and the community. One of the hardest things a board and management team will have to settle in their minds is: At what point do the interests of employes take precedent over the interests of the general public?

Remember two points from the beginning: (1) Every strike will have an ending; (2) At some point during impasse, all the issues that have led to that impasse must be told in a straightforward, no-holds-barred manner.

Looking ahead

- Pull together a small coordinating team and appoint a leader.
- Determine one spokesman and make that person available at all times.
- Review all news media personnel, numbers, etc.
- Deal with issues, not personalities. Don't attack the union.
- Gather all available statistical data to ensure quick communications. (Play the "what if" game.)
- Review all communication channels to the community. Preaddress envelopes to key communicators or community groups. Set up a telephone network.
- Set up methods to communicate with internal audiences.
- Keep public officials informed, but know sensitive areas. Sometimes other public employe unions sympathize with teachers or other public employe groups.
- If strike is imminent, all legal procedures must be ready and the full strike plan ready to put into motion.

Strike ready

- Prepare supervisory personnel.
- Additional resources for student and non-striking personnel safety.
- Alternative plans for deliveries, school lunches, supplies, etc.
- Arrange for photographs and audio recording equipment.

Communication during a school strike requires objectivity and truthfulness.

- Develop plans for communicating with parents.

When the strike occurs

- Determine all legal maneuvers.
- Brief all board members, principals and supervisory personnel.
- Alert all local and state officials.
- Issue news releases and statements as appropriate.
- Activate communications to selected community groups.
- Inform administrators in neighboring school districts.
- Don't allow striking employes to intimidate students, parents and nonstriking employes.
- Don't guess in your decision making.
- Keep meticulous records.
- Don't allow strikes to force intolerable conditions. Lack of effective action may just do that.
- Use the resources of your state school boards association.
- Do not make the mistake of "round the clock bargaining."

Communications control center

- It establishes a central control point for internal management.
- Provides base area for district spokesman and media relations.
- Provides a data control and collection point.
- Makes a central point where rumors can be controlled.
- Credibility is the name of the game. And who should have the facts? The people charged with running the school district on a day-to-day basis or union president walking the picket lines?

A communications center provides an area for the district spokesman and a base for controlling rumors. Credibility is the name of the game.

Board members

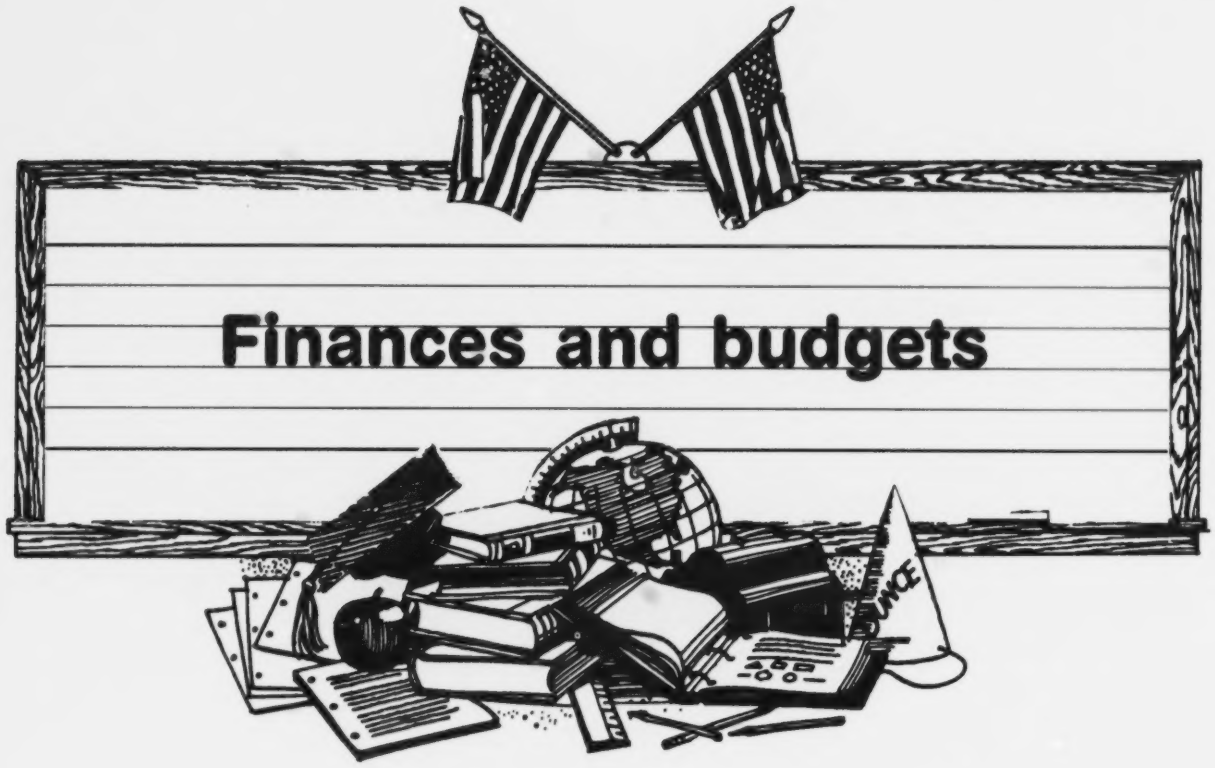
- If a determination is made to operate schools either on a part-time basis or to keep them open — board members need to be cool.
- Day-to-day operations are administrative concerns.
- Let your constituents know the board is in control.
- Prime objective during strike is to split the board or make superintendent target — "no confidence by union."
- Do not let emotional reactions take over.
- Keep in touch with the superintendent. Two-way communication is important.
- Ward off interference from other agencies — state and local.
- Be prepared for harassment.
- Be prepared legally.

After the strike

- Inform the employes and the public of all the settlement facts.
- Meet with all supervisory staff so they understand the contract.
- Set up small group meetings with employes to explain contract.
- Carry on a continuous communication program with public and employes.
- Strikes are determined by employe representatives. Strikes will have no necessary relationship to what you agree to do or fail to agree to do. What ends up in the contract will.
- A strike is not the worst thing that can happen to your educational program. What you give away to the third party is.

Contributed by ***Nick Goble,*** *PSBA assistant executive director.*

CHAPTER 7



Finances and budgets

133 Financial and business affairs

137 School district budgets:
A public relations plus

141 Planning a budget development process

145 Involving the public in budget decisions

Financial and business affairs

In a very real sense, a community charges the board of education with the task of purchasing education for its children. Wise communities do not want the board to discharge this by buying the cheapest education. In education, as in most things, economy is not generally determined by initial price paid. Citizens want, and rightly so, to feel confident that the board is operating public affairs with the care and prudence of a good business.

The development of sound policies of business practice and the undeviating adherence to these policies is a mark of an efficient board. A good benchmark is this: A board member should feel confident that the best business people in town could thoroughly study the practices of the school district in purchasing, in accounting, in maintenance, in inventory control, and in financial management, and say that the schools are operated satisfactorily.

Taxes provide virtually all of the funds for public education. Statewide, a little less than half of this tax revenue is provided by the state and 50-55% by local levy. During most of the 1980s, federal revenue sources assisted in no more than 2-3% of a typical district's total budget.

Districts vary in the extent to which they receive state funds, since a part of the commonwealth function is to equalize educational opportunity among residents of the state. Relatively larger contributions, called subsidies, are made to districts with less ability to raise funds locally.

Since 1968, subsidy payments have been made on a "weighted pupil" basis. A district's Weighted Average Daily Membership is calculated by multiplying the number of students enrolled by the appropriate factor for each: kindergarten — 0.5; elementary — 1.0; secondary — 1.36. Thus, two school districts with the same number of students, but with different totals in the various grade levels, would have different WADMs.

The subsidy formula compares the amount of a district's wealth per weighted student with the amount of wealth per WADM statewide. Prior to Act 59 of 1977, only property wealth (market valuation) as determined by the State Tax Equalization Board was included in this calculation. The 1977 law added personal income as another factor in determining wealth per WADM.

The process of determining a district's wealth, and thereby its relative need for state financial assistance, results in its Market Value/Personal Income Aid Ratio, more commonly known as aid ratio. The aid ratio is a reflection of a district's ability to raise local revenues. In computing the aid ratio, property market value is given a 60% weighting and personal income is weighted at 40%. These calculations are used to equitably distribute the basic instructional subsidy.

Most subsidy funds currently are distributed on the basis of a formula that includes aid ratio, WADMs and a fixed dollar amount per pupil, known as the Factor for Educational Expense.

Although most state aid to public education is paid in the form of the Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education, a variety of special funding programs compensate for needs peculiar to specific districts. Such needs include grants for: school building construction; pupil transportation; homebound instruction; driver education; special education; pupil health services; density-sparsity; and poverty payments.

From the beginning of the state's public school system, support by local taxpayers

Citizens want to feel confident that the board is operating public affairs with the care and prudence of a good business.

School boards in Pennsylvania have much greater authority to levy taxes in the exercise of their own discretion than is true in many other states.

has been essential in providing resources necessary to provide instructional programs and related services. The state's funding role is intended primarily to ensure an equitable distribution of resources among districts of widely varying wealth, and not to replace or supplant local funding.

Therefore the General Assembly, which is charged by the Pennsylvania Constitution with responsibility for maintaining and supporting a system of public education, has delegated to school boards authority to levy taxes to help support the schools they administer.

In the late 1940s, the Legislature passed the first so-called Tax-Anything Law as a means of expanding the number of tax revenue sources available to municipalities and school districts. Re-enacted as Act 511 of 1965, the Local Tax Enabling Act remains the single largest alternative to the property tax for school districts.

Act 511 authorizes the levying of earned income, occupation, and per capita and other taxes within certain limits. In the aggregate, these levies may not exceed the equivalent of 12 mills of real estate taxes for the taxing body. Whenever two coterminus political subdivisions (such as school district and municipality) impose any one of the taxes authorized by Act 511, proceeds must be shared equally or as otherwise agreed upon. Each, however, is entitled to claim up to one-half of the limitation for each tax.

In addition to Act 511, school taxing powers are governed by the Public School Code. Section 679 of that law authorizes a per capita tax not to exceed $5 for each resident over age 18. The code also provides for school property taxes. Except in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, there is a 25-mill limit for general school purposes, imposed by Section 672(a). However, that is eclipsed by Section 672(b) which authorizes an additional property tax to pay for salaries, building rentals, sinking fund charges and amortization of bond issues. In effect, school districts are unlimited in the use of the property tax.

Statewide, the property tax accounts for more than 75% of the local taxes collected by school districts, but constitutes only about one-third of the total support of public education.

Pennsylvania's reliance on the property tax for public schools compares well with other states. The Pennsylvania Tax Commission, in its 1981 report, noted that 35 states rely more heavily on the real estate levy to finance education and concluded that the commonwealth is "about average in terms of proportion of revenues for school districts that is derived from the property tax."

In recent years, much of the controversy surrounding the school property tax can be traced to inefficient assessment practices and insufficient state funding for the basic school subsidy.

Pennsylvania boards have much greater authority to levy taxes in the exercise of their own descretion than is true in many other states. This imposes a dual responsibility upon the individual director who must help determine what is needed in order to fulfill the responsibility of providing for quality education and, simultaneously, consider the effect of school taxes as a part of the total tax structure in a community.

A board may incur debt. Furthermore, in many circumstances, efficient management of the financial affairs of the district requires some borrowing. Section 631 of the code establishes the specific purposes for which debt may be incurred.

Act 185, enacted in 1972, completely revamped the borrowing authority of school districts and other local governments. Debt may be incurred through the issuance of bonds as provided by law. In addition, temporary indebtedness from borrowing in anticipation of income is authorized. (Section 634) Temporary indebtedness is also controlled by the provisions of Act 185.

The skill with which the budget process is carried out in a school district is often taken as a reliable index of the general quality of administration of the schools. Certainly, it is a function of crucial importance.

The annual budget must be developed on forms distributed by the Department of

Education for that purpose. Anticipated expenditures must be listed by the several departments as appropriate. Public notice at least 10 days prior to final adoption of the the budget is required. The tentative budget must be available to the public for study at least 20 days prior to the final adoption. A copy of the adopted budget must be filed with the Department of Education within 15 days after adoption. (Section 687)

The fiscal year for districts of the second, third and fourth class begins July 1. Districts of the second class may, however, establish by two-thirds vote of the directors, a fiscal year to begin January 1. Districts of the first class have their fiscal year established as January 1. (Section 671)

Widely recommended budget practices for schools include:

- Budgeting is a continuous process.
- Responsibility for the total budget preparation is lodged with superintendents and their staff.
- Both instructional and noninstructional members of the staff are engaged in the development of the budget with as wide involvement as is possible.
- Continuous evaluation of the operation of the current budget is practiced.
- As soon as an annual budget is adopted, work begins upon its successor.
- A specific budget calendar exists to establish deadlines for completion of various steps in the budget process.
- Annual budgets are developed in conformity with long-range budget plans which reflect the board's goals for the schools.

In simpler times, school budgets represented nothing more than a statement of anticipated income for the year and a categorization of how the board expected to spend the money. Growing complexities in managing public affairs, coupled with more sophisticated techniques, now require the board and administration to use the budget for more than this.

Basically, a budget represents an income plan and an expenditure plan. Beyond this, however, it must represent an educational plan. Board members must see the budget as a set of plans for the education of children reduced to financial terms. Rhetoric aside, that for which the board provides funds is the measure of the practical educational philosophy of that board and a reliable means by which the professional staff will judge what is valued by the board.

Funds budgeted for certain purposes may not be used for other purposes or transferred except by two-thirds vote of the directors. Except in very unusual circumstances, this practice would be appropriate only late in the fiscal year when more accurate views of relative needs are possible than could be made at the time of adoption. (Section 609) Transfers may legally be made only during the last nine months of a fiscal year. (Section 687)

Once the district has adopted a budget, the normal purchasing practices of the schools may begin. The statutes require that no obligations may be incurred in excess of the amount provided for in the budget. (Section 609)

All payments shall be made on orders of the board drawn on the treasurer. Each order shall state on its face the item of the budget upon which it is drawn.

Considerable efficiency of operation can be achieved when a board authorizes someone to act as purchasing agent. The agent may purchase school supplies of either class up to an amount of $4,000 in accordance with the budget. (Section 807.1)

Sealed bids are required for the purchase of supplies in some cases. Depending upon size of district and amount and kind of purchase, other legal requirements of bidding procedure and public notification may be required.

The board is required to accept the lowest bid only where the kind and quality of material is equivalent. The board may, at its discretion, reject all bids. It may also accept single items from any bid. (sections 806, 807)

Unless taxes are collected as anticipated

A school district budget represents an income plan and an expenditure plan. However, it must also represent an educational plan.

School boards have been delegated authority by the General Assembly to levy taxes to help support the schools.

in the establishment of the budget, expenditures will outstrip revenues.

School boards do not have direct authority over the various bodies responsible for establishing the tax duplicate. However, cooperation and mutual assistance between public agencies can do much toward achieving equity. School districts can do much through proper census techniques to ensure accurate records of taxables.

The collection of taxes is carried out by an elected tax collector in most cases. In others, the board is empowered to appoint a suitable person to perform this function. (Section 683) The statues provide for action by the board to collect delinquent taxes. (sections 686, 3058, 3059)

Districts of the second, third and fourth class are required to provide for audits by the controller or auditor of the municipality or, alternatively, to employ a certified public accountant for that purpose. (Section 2401) The audit for districts of the first class is by the school controller. Various statutes pertaining to the powers of auditors and the disposition of the audits define this responsibility in detail.

The auditor general of the commonwealth audits the accounts of any district that receives subsidies or reimbursements from the commonwealth.

Special fund accounts are often referred to as nonpublic funds, since they do not result from taxation. However, these organizations exist under the supervision of the school. The board of education has a positive duty to provide for audit of cafeteria funds (Section 504) and student organization accounts. (Section 511)

Funds which flow into a school district's accounts either from tax returns or from reimbursements from the commonwealth come in large amounts which then are expended by the district over a period of time. This results in most school districts having funds on hand temporarily, which will be expended later in the school year.

Prudent concern for the welfare of taxpayers, as well as for the education program, demands that these funds be put to work earning interest promptly to the extent possible.

In the same manner, funds which are a part of a capital reserve fund will be available for temporary investment until the project for which they have been accumulated matures. These capital reserve funds must, however, be kept entirely separate from other funds of the district.

Aggressive investment programs by boards result in considerable additional income for their districts. This can reduce the amount of taxes levied in the future, provide additional funds for upgrading education, or both.

Excerpted from ***To Use These Talents,*** *©1969 and 1973, and from* ***Understanding School Finances,*** *©1987, Pennsylvania School Boards Association.*

School district budgets: A public relations plus

The annual school district budget can be the most powerful public relations tool at your disposal. If that statement takes you by surprise, read on.

An annual budget is the district's blueprint for the coming year. As a public relations tool, the budget tells the school story in dollars and cents. Budget communications with the community can be on a positive note, if the budget is based on goals and objectives that reflect the community's needs and priorities. First and foremost, find out what the public wants and what they will or won't support before setting budget priorities.

Budgeting is a year-round process and the communication surrounding the budget should follow a year-long calendar as well. The two should be intertwined.

Working together, the community can be informed and involved in a useful way. An involved community is an informed community — one that is less likely to be suspicious of every dollar spent and that is more likely to support the goals of the district. In states where budgets hinge on voter referendums, the concept of year-round budget communications is not new. You can learn from the districts where budget referendums are a way of life.

More than 20 years ago, Ovsiew and Castetter said in the classic, *Budgeting for Better Schools:* "Budget considerations begin with educational objectives. Administrative and board leadership must understand clearly what today's schools are expected to accomplish in modern society. Translated into its simplest terms, this means the school board should analyze the community's educational needs and priorities and work to provide a program that reflects these needs. A budget that accounts for these needs is the next logical step."

Start early: Chances are you'll be working on one fiscal year's budget before the previous fiscal year has ended. Follow a calendar.

Translate into plain English: In everything you say or print, translate the educationese and budget jargon into plain English. That includes your revenue estimates, your expenditures, your balance sheets and your educational program, too. Gobbledygook has lost more supporters than it ever gained.

Reduce dollars into sense: Per school, per classroom, or per child figures will make a lot more sense to the average person than districtwide statistics. To a parent

Working together, the community can be informed and involved in a useful way.

Budgeting is a year-round process and the communication surrounding the budget should follow a year-long calendar. The two should be intertwined.

making $12,000 - $20,000 a year, $1 million is just as mind-boggling as $25 million. Graphic displays can help explain complex financial concepts, and charts are intended to simplify. Don't try to crowd too much into them.

Translate into people terms: School budgets are more than 75% people. Who are they? What do they do? To say that a threatened cutback of "x" million dollars will "curtail" educational services means nothing to the reader or listener. But, when you say it will mean one less teacher in each school or the elimination of a special program, or five more kids in each classroom — you'll hit home. Remember, not everyone is a CPA!

Use established meetings to communicate: If your superintendent holds regular coffees or discussion sessions with community groups, use these opportunities to talk about the budget process. Everyone has a special project or priority and it's the board's task to develop priorities and match the needs with available revenue.

Keep the focus on the child: Schools (and budgets) exist to improve the quality of education for kids. Never lose your focus.

Explain what you want to do with the money: It's not enough to ask for support on faith. Why do you need money? Why is a tax increase necessary? What deficiencies can be corrected? How will money be put to use? Break the categories into simple terms.

Select a spokesman: Whoever is selected to communicate the budget process should be an articulate and comfortable spokesman, someone equally comfortable with the public and the media. Business managers often shy away from this task, since they may not have a lot of direct contact with the community or the media. Whoever is selected should be knowledgeable, honest and readily available to answer questions.

The budget development process is complex. It is critical to the well-being of the school system. Because it is both complex and critical, constant communication is absolutely necessary. More help is available to school boards, superintendents and administrators. Here are some associations you can turn to:

- National School Public Relations Association
  1801 N. Moore St.
  Arlington, VA 22209
- Pennsylvania School Boards Association
  774 Limekiln Rd.
  New Cumberland, PA 17070
- American Association of School Administrators
  1801 N. Moore St.
  Arlington, VA 22209
- Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association

---

*Contributed by **Judi Boren**, coordinator of public relations, North Allegheny School District, Pittsburgh.*

Budget development and communication calendar

June

Budget adoption, news release, budget newsletter to community. Collect and tally staff input on goals and objectives for the coming year.

July

Administration recommends goals and objectives to the school board for the coming year; update proforma budget.

August

School board formally adopts district goals and objectives. Superintendent and administrators begin writing their performance measures to coordinate with district goals. Publicize goals and objectives in district newsletter, or through the media. Include this information with school letters to staff and in initial inservice programs.

September

Present a district goal preview to community groups such as parent-faculty groups, citizen advisory committee, superintendent coffee group. Communicate goals and proforma budget data with municipalities. Advertise all school board meetings and work sessions.

October-December

Prepare and complete administrative budget needs assessment; give budget allocations to principals; complete faculty needs assessments. Solicit input from school-related groups.

December

Conduct budget guidance sessions with superintendent and board.

January-March

Work continues to refine preliminary budget. Issue news releases regarding how the district uses the budget monies, special programs, state aid, and so on.

April

Begin budget work sessions with the board. Schedule public budget input sessions and advertise.

May

Hold district goals reviews; list accomplishments. Schedule preliminary budget adoption and advertise. Publish preliminary budget report.

Planning a budget development process

A board of school directors, acting upon the advice of the administrative staff and their own knowledge and common sense, must determine what the schools are to do, what they are for. The educational program must be established and goals for it must be set. The board then must establish a budget development process and ultimately a budget to meet those goals.

The local district budget is a financial plan to fund not only the annual operation of the schools but the improvement of local education for the future.

But times are changing. Although budget is defined as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, the budget development process probably should change. The following from Coombs and Hallack's "Managing Educational Costs," supports the need for a fresh look at how school budgets are put together.

> Despite the substantial gains of the past decade, educational cost analysis is still in a very rudimentary state compared to what will be needed in the years ahead. If the increasingly complex problems and choices confronting educational systems are to be dealt with intelligently, if these systems are to get the most from their severely limited resources, if they are to adapt speedily enough to important changes in their environment and extricate themselves from a deepening crisis, then educational systems must have far better information about themselves and their environment than they now possess, and better analytical instruments for applying this information to decision making.

Current changes in Shippensburg Area School District environment include:

- Enrollment decline — from 3,341 in 1975-76 to 2,750 in 1983-84; 2,611 projected for 1989-90 before an increase is expected.
- Cost increases reflected by budgets of $4,631,998 in 1975-76 and $8,596,976 in 1983-84.
- Increasing need for increased local funding of the annual budget — local share in 1975-76 was 48.3%, 61.9% in 1981-82.

In addition, the mood of taxpayers, both nationally and locally, favors cost effectiveness and fiscal restraint. This mood has, however, caused more complaints about program cuts than about tax increases. In fact, members of the Shippensburg school community have been more vocal in their opposition to reductions such as dropping the rifle team as an interscholastic sport, reducing the planetarium program, and cutting back the Adult Farmer program than in any complaining about rising taxes.

Although people are going to be reluctant to have any of their taxes increase, most expect school costs and their concomitant taxes to go up in an economy where everything goes up. They do have a right,

Educators are concerned that budgeting is becoming increasingly negative. School boards are left to budget slashing rather than directed toward budget building. Here is one district's effort to retain the board's legitimate and positive role in planning and developing an annual district budget.

The board must know what the community wants its schools to do, but also board members must budget for what they believe the schools must do.

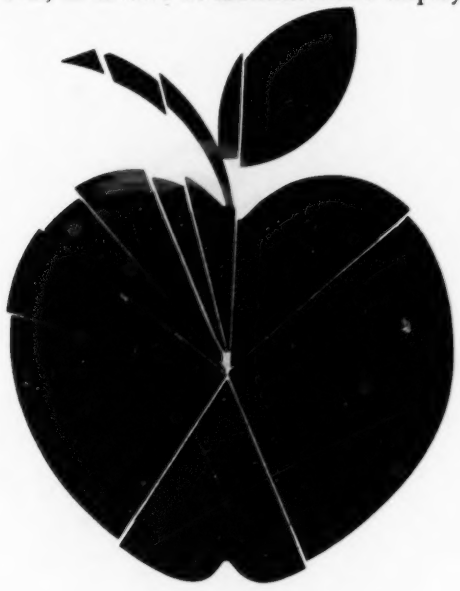
however, to also expect that the schools will be well managed, successful and cost conscious.

In a survey conducted in November 1980 as a part of the district's long-range planning process, Shippensburg community members were asked, among other things, to respond to statements about school finances in the district. Few felt they understood how local education is funded, and the greatest criticism of the district was the lack of knowledge most citizens had of it. Taxpayers, parents and nonparents, want a greater knowledge and understanding of what the schools are doing in most areas, including finances.

As a result of the long-range plan, the district is attempting to communicate better with its community. Increased understanding of the schools' operations and programs should bring more support. This seems particularly true when related to finances and the budget.

Shippensburg Area School District has historically espoused faculty and staff participation in processes such as budget development, the results of which will have an effect on district employes. Departments and grade levels play a major role in advising what the budget being developed will include. It is not only democratic and theoretically sensible but practical for employes to have some say in what is purchased to help them do their jobs.

It is considerably more difficult, however, to involve nonadministrative employes in advising on what is not to be purchased or what is to be reduced. A committee can be of valuable assistance in recommending the addition of a computer program, but that same committee can hardly offer much assistance in decisions on how to remove one mill from the budget. Everyone wants cuts to come from someone else's program.



Education has gotten very cost-result conscious and in light of the times, so it should. However, cost is not always measured in money nor results by test scores. Cost-result analysis must include consideration of intangibles such as locally defined educational quality, public opinion and desired student opportunities.

The budget that is ultimately developed cannot include only those things that can be justified because they are inexpensive. It must contain programs that the community expects or that the board believes it should offer.

In addition, money saved by not offering something may be more than offset by a loss of community support for the whole school program.

Some conclusions

Consideration of the foregoing leads to the following extensions and conclusions.

- School district budgeting should be a form of planning and should be goal based.
- Planning and goal setting should be based on knowledge of current, and a reasonable prediction of future, environmental conditions in local education.
- Accurate, dependable information about recent fiscal history is essential to budgetary planning.
- The board must know what the community wants its schools to do, but also board members must budget for what they, collectively, believe the schools must do.
- The budget development process should include consideration of the following criteria in maintaining or improving district programs:
  - — Should the local district provide it?
  - — How many district students are assisted by it?
  - — Is it necessary to the support of the instructional program?

— Does it or will it improve the quality of the district offerings?
— Is it, or can it be made, cost effective?

• Whenever possible, the budget should reflect savings resulting from enrollment decline.

• Education costs should not be inflationary. They should not contribute to inflation even though they may result from it.

• Budget development should be participatory to the extent participation can be effective. Faculty, staff and community involvement in the process should be only whenever these nonadministrators can effectively advise on the subject.

• The budget development process must result from cost-result analysis. All costs and results, measurable as well as the less tangible, must be considered.

• Budgeting, first and foremost, should be for the improvement of the educational program in the local school district.

Recommended process: Budgeting for improvement

If the schools have been successful, budgeting has been relevant and realistic and current taxpayer dissatisfaction is no more than is to be expected, the district may fairly assume it is doing what it should.

If the schools have been cost conscious, have cut back to reflect enrollment decline and have still gotten the desired and expected results, the district may fairly assume its budgeting procedures, although perhaps needing periodic updating, do not require complete and drastic change.

Budgeting should be for educational improvement, given the environment in the local school community. But how does budgeting for improvement differ from the traditional view of school budget development?

The answer is that it **may not** differ from current budget development procedures. Present procedures may be adequate; change may only be in emphasis or degree. Budgeting for improvement will contain the following elements, whether or not current budgeting procedures do.

- **Goal orientation.** With the primary, overall goal being improve-

Annotated calendar for budgeting for improvement

June

- Budget adoption. Budgeting for improvement utilizes the current budget as a basis for improving the program through modifications of its contents.

July-November

Goal Setting and Budget Planning

- July and August — The administration recommends goals and budget plans for the upcoming budget development process. Recommendations will include reductions to reflect enrollment decline as well as priorities for program maintenance and improvement.*
- August and September — Board discusses the recommendations for plans and goals. The board is apprised of early cost and revenue estimates, as well as projected regulation and enrollment changes.
- September and October — At a public meeting of the board, goals and plans are acted upon and well publicized. Goals become part of the budget development process and the budget. The public is informed of how the development process will occur.

January-May

- Through work sessions, open to the public, the board of school directors will discuss proposals for and drafts of the various budget sections. During this period the administration will adjust the proposed budget to reflect these board discussions and, ultimately, in May, will propose a final draft for tentative adoption. The final budget will include the goals agreed upon by the board.
- Although individual members and/or the entire board may react positively or negatively to items in the proposed budget, it shall be the administration's job to recommend what is in the proposed budget based on their (the administration's) views on what is needed to budget for improvement in the light of all the foregoing.

* In the late spring the district's faculty, through its curriculum committee, will propose possible budget development goals for consideration by the administration in July and August.

Budgeting should be for educational improvement, given the environment in the local school community.

ment of the educational program.

- **Participation.** Opportunity for those who should participate and can contribute to the process to do so.
- **Openness.** The budget should be developed according to well-advertised procedures and fully explained to the school community.

Obviously no budget development process is going to be a panacea, particularly one with changes as subtle as the process described here. However, this process has accomplished the following objectives. It is more positive and more goal oriented. It does lead to program improvement. It is a process that can be communicated and, as such, leads to better community understanding of and support for school priorities. And lastly, it is a budget development process that significantly reduces petty internal bickering and increases higher order thinking and discussion — planning for better schools.

Contributed by ***Dr. Robert N. Kratz,*** *superintendent of Shippensburg Area School District, Cumberland Co. Reprinted from* ***PSBA Bulletin,*** *February 1985.*

Involving the public in budget decisions

Pennsylvania, unlike other states, has few requirements for public hearings or citizen involvement in developing or adopting school district budgets. Some states, such as Ohio and Illinois, must go directly to the public for voter approval of millage increases and bond levies.

But that doesn't mean Pennsylvania boards and administrators don't agonize over the process or do everything humanly possible to keep school costs under control.

Now is the time to look ahead if you are planning to involve more of the community in next year's budget process.

Here are some points to ponder:

- The time seems long past when citizens automatically ante up more money for education "because our kids need it." The days of "shopping lists" for public schools seem to be over.
- Educating the community (and the staff for that matter) about school budgets represents "the most critical teaching job" facing administrators and school boards.
- Basics about school finance — subsidy, mandated programs, types of taxes, how computed — all are generally difficult for the public.
- Preparing the budget is an administrative function, BUT school directors need considerable inservice and attention to school district finances.
- New board members need at least a two-year cycle to gain a clearer understanding of the budgeting process, accounting, auditing and other school business procedures.

Community Involvement

An involved community is an informed community, and an informed community will make the right decision. Don't rely on last-minute propaganda efforts to turn things your way because it's probably already too late.

Early involvement gives the school system a head start by revealing the taxpayers' mood, and their educational priorities, before you're so far along you can't switch tactics or budget demands without fatal embarrassment.

Involving the consumer enables you to get valuable suggestions from people who care. Remember, you aren't the only smart person in your district.

When you decide to involve the community you must be prepared to tell all. That means a willingness to share any and all financial information with the public, including, if necessary, items you aren't proud

An involved community is an informed community; an informed community will make the right decision.

of. Attempts to hide or distort will mean instant grief, because there are budget experts out there ready to pounce.

It is important to set ground rules and live by them. Know what you expect citizens to do, and tell them clearly and unequivocally. Tell them what your role in the process will be and then follow the process.

Explain your financial situation in simple, one syllable words. Columns of figures mean nothing to the average citizen. Be able to translate your revenues and expenditures into language they can understand and figures they can comprehend.

If you expect the public to buy improvements to an educational program, you must explain it completely yet simply. If they don't understand it, they won't buy it.

A budget guide, written in everyday English with a few charts and tables that are easy to understand, is a must. But there must also be meetings, forums or other types of gatherings where members of the community can have their questions answered. It is important to allow the public to have a chance to make recommendations to the superintendent and the school board while there's still time to have an impact.

When the process is complete, report back to the community about what happened to their priorities and recommendations. If you accepted their suggestions, point out which ones; if you ignored them, for your own credibility's sake don't ignore too many — explain why.

Once you're into involvement, there's no getting out. And the chances are it will be better the second and the third time around.

Contributed by ***Nick Goble,*** *PSBA assistant executive director.*

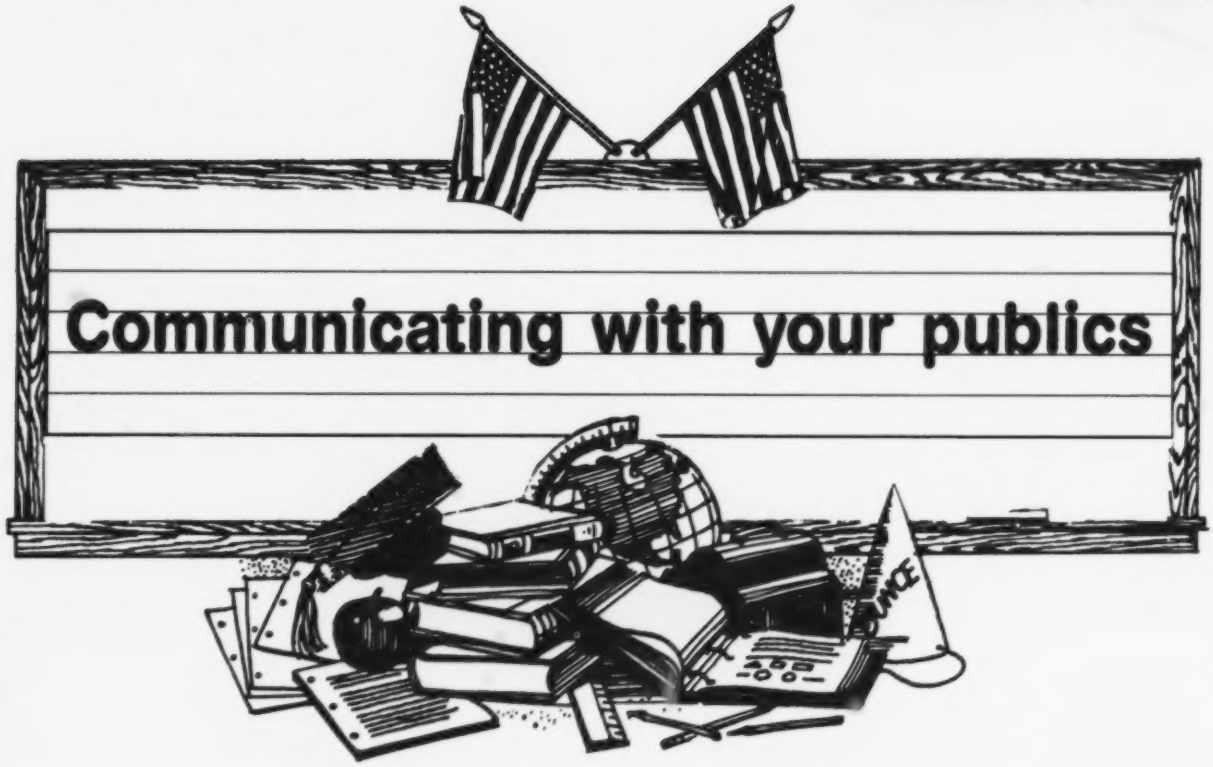
If you really go public, there are certain 'givens'

- Year-round communication programs and publications must be in place. "Love-me-suddenly" activities just won't work.
- If citizens are generally ignored most of the year and then you suddenly count them in around budget time, pressure groups will undoubtedly form. (There is no guarantee that you won't have them even if you do have a solid communication program.)
- Effective school management and solid communication are synonymous. Elected school officials have a mandate to communicate.
- School budgets must be understandable. Long, voluminous documents must be reduced to everyday language easily understood.
- School budgets must be credible in the eyes of the citizenry, which will probably require some form of staff and citizen involvement.
- Each year budget decisions and communication probably requires a tailor-made approach to the community.

Every audience needs to know:

- **Where the money comes from** — which sources will provide more or less next year and what the impact will be on the taxpayers.
- **Where the money goes** — how much for instruction, administration, transportation, athletics, and so on.
- **If you're spending the tax dollar wisely** — stress accountability and give examples of economy efforts, good management practices, comparisons with similar school district spending elsewhere.
- **What young people need for a better education and why** — how will your proposals provide better education for students in your district. What are the likely results with and without the proposed improvements.
- **Why you need more money** — emphasize what portion of the budget increase is required for enrollment increases or other factors beyond the schools' control (such as inflation), and what part is for program improvements.

CHAPTER 8



Communicating with your publics

149 School-community relations and effective schools

153 Six steps to building school-community relations

157 Make your school inviting

161 Don't bet against polls

165 Helpful guidelines for advisory committees

169 Educational atmosphere-relationship study: A management-communication inventory

School-community relations and effective schools

The terms "school public relations" and "school communications" are two of the most misunderstood, and often the most over used, in seeking solutions to the many challenges facing education.

Use either of the terms with local school boards and administrators and usually their attention turns to newsletters, news releases and media relations.

In addition policy makers often view community relations or public relations activities as unnecessary expenditures. As school boards wrestle with diminishing financial resources, student population declines or tax increases, such public spending is laid on the cutting block, explained away as a "frill, expendable and serving no useful purpose in the teaching-learning process."

Such a view is faulty in terms of one of the primary tasks of the local school board and its professional staff. That task suggests that the relations within the school system — and between the schools and the citizenry — be as positive and mutually supportive as possible. To do this requires well-managed schools and planned, organized and effective communications and human relations.

The mandate by public officials to communicate remains constant. As long as schools are open, staff working and teaching, children attending class and public services being performed, the school management-communication function continues.

Often school boards may think they can put off giving time and attention to their communication responsibilities, especially when the system "has more pressing issues" or no crisis appears on the horizon. Such a myopic perception separates the management-communication function from the total, year-round process of planned community involvement. To earn public understanding and support requires one common school policy function: planned, organized and effective communication.

Until recently, most policy makers and school administrators could not point to studies and examples which supported school-community activities that have direct relationships with student achievement levels. Today, the evidence is clear and offers local policy makers a more precise roadmap in planning and program development.

Several studies, especially *The Search for Successful Secondary Schools,* point to many factors that separate the differences between "excellent" schools and "average."

While there are nine distinct themes in these reports, all closely related in strong principal-staff-pupil relationships, the school-community interaction is distinctive.

For instance, the 571 exemplary schools cited in the study by the U.S. Department of Education were not immune to the problems of other schools. Nearly two-thirds identified many obstacles facing policy makers and staff such as declining enrollments, financial issues and facility problems. But these schools offer creative responses, many viewing problems as opportunities. Underlying this attitude is the support of their communities, the report notes, particularly parents and board members who expect success and give their schools the discretion and resources to achieve it.

In exemplary schools, staff not only invite the community into the schools, but take the schools, their programs and students into the community.

Strong parent organizations seem to be the norm. These schools are promoted by community members through vigorous public relations campaigns. School staff not only invite the community into the schools, but take the schools, their programs and students into the community.

Another string of studies points to a correlation between student achievement and structured school-community relations.

Author Ann Henderson, in her annotated bibliography for the National Committee for Citizens in Education, points to more than 50 studies that connect parent involvement in education and improved student achievement. She concludes in the report, *The Evidence Continues to Grow,* "When parents are involved, children do better in school and they go to better schools."

Other research indicates that schools that relate well to their communities have student bodies that outperform other schools. Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school have higher scores than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved.

Relations between the schools and the citizenry should be as positive and mutually supportive as possible.

Today's school officials have a clear mandate to focus new attention on the merits of effective staff and community relations. As the research data continue to connect effective school-community relations and student achievement, it now becomes imperative that local boards establish effective policy and review the many activities they may or may not deem appropriate in their respective communities.

Al Holliday, editor of the *Journal of Educational Public Relations,* suggests that the time has arrived for boards to give priority attention to effective school PR.

"Most everything educators do in the areas of communication does not direct relationships with student achievement levels, but they don't realize it or put it into perspective," he notes. He recommends four factors to quality education and proposes a new definition of the school public relations function that school boards, administrators and staff can use for guidance in establishing goals and objectives in their schools.

Holliday's definition states:

> Educational public relations is a planned, systematic function to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization to directly or indirectly improve or maintain optimal levels of student achievement.
>
> It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving internal and external publics. Its goals are to: 1. Build an understanding of the role, objective, accomplishments and needs of the organization leading to public understanding and support; 2. Facilitate opportunities to develop high and appropriate standards and expectations of student achievement;

Lessons from successful schools

In examining a selection of exemplary schools, the linkage between the community and the schools is powerful. Unlike the citadels of earlier years, the best schools today tend to open themselves to their communities in a variety of ways. Here are some policies and practices outlined in the U.S. Department of Education's report, *The Search for Successful Secondary Schools.*

1. Extensive opportunites are made available for volunteers to give of their time, experience and good will. Parents and community members are viewed as potential contributors to the school in a variety of ways.

2. These schools use aggressive public relations campaigns that rely on parents as promoters, communicators and decision makers. Volunteers write and send out elaborate newsletters informing the community about the schools.

3. Exemplary schools tend to have staff that can attract additional funding resources from the community. This includes grants and corporate employe expertise toward such things as citizenship, scholarship and even pupil attendance.

4. These schools have a planned, aggressive process of bringing the community-at-large into the schools. There is a sense of community ownership, and the school staff and students conduct activities back into the community.

5. The schools identify with the unique characteristics of the community through the history and heritage of the area. Such identity offers a technical pool to the schools and builds political support across constituencies.

3. Promote a school climate providing for maximum staff productivity and to permit an optimal learning atmosphere for students; 4. Structure programs for maximum parent involvement in their children's educational programs; and 5. Encourage broad participation of the citizenry in their schools and related educational organizations.

The articles and suggested guidance included in this chapter will offer school directors an opportunity to review and assess current school-community relations practices based on current policy and the above definition.

Communications programs for public schools are now a proven component in effective student achievement. Such activities will require the best thinking and planning by today's policy makers. They will require staff time and energy and some expenditures. But we know now such efforts that can be supported, evaluated and measured provide a long-term benefit for students.

Contributed by ***Nick Goble,*** *PSBA assistant executive director.*

To earn public understanding and support requires planned, organized, effective communication.

Developing an effective communication program

Effective administration demands thoughtful planning and preparation of myriad elements. Planning for communication is a necessary part of the administrative process. Therefore, planning and organizing for effective communication should be given a top priority in both the time and effort of administrators. Specifically organizational philosophy, goals, policy, and procedures should be developed to achieve and to maintain effective communication.

Key questions to ask

There are several key questions that it would be helpful to ask when planning the communication program:

1. What are our specific communication needs and goals?
2. What are our most severe problems and their causes?
3. Are our goals and expectations realistic and attainable?
4. Are attitudes of key personnel consistent with the communication goals and policies?
5. How can the communication channels and organizational structure be revised to enhance communicating?
6. What information needs to go to whom, when, why, how, and by what means?
7. How prevalent is rumor and why?
8. How can the problems of specialized roles and differentiated status be overcome to facilitate improved communication?
9. Is there undue reliance on certain communication media?
10. How can we assure better feedback and effectively evaluate the communications program?

A Guide to Effective Communication, ***Walter D. St. John,*** *©1970.*

Six steps in building school-community relations

Periodically, school officials should pause and go through several steps in their review process. Such a process will usually reveal one important point: **You're doing better than you think.** But the process will also reveal areas for new programs, as well as those needing modification.

Before discussing the six steps in building school-community relations, let us look at the terms school public relations, community relations and school communications. Often they are used synonymously.

One definition from the National School Public Relations Association defines educational PR as: . . .a **planned and systematic two-way process** of communication between an educational organization and its internal and external publics, designed **to build** morale, goodwill, cooperation **and support** for that organization.

Another example of school public relations takes this direction:

- Public relations is as simple as a thank-you note and as complicated as a four-color brochure.
- It's as specific as writing a news release and as general as sensing community attitudes.
- It's as inexpensive as a phone call to an editor or a parent or as costly as a full-page advertisement.
- It's as direct as a conversation between two people and as broad as a radio show reaching thousands of listeners.
- It's as visual as a poster and as literal as a speech.

What is public relations? It's a term often used — seldom defined. In its broadest sense, public relations is "good work, publicly recognized." There is no secret formula. Public relations is simply a group itself saying:"This is who we are, what we think about ourselves, what we want to do and why we deserve your support."

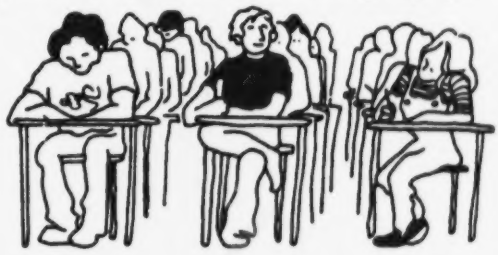
In this brief overview, we suggest that local officials consider a process that examines six main areas.

1. Identify your audiences.
2. Explain programs and decisions.
3. Organize for communication.
4. Create positive employe relations.
5. Provide feedback.
6. Revise and revitalize

Identify your audiences

Audience identification is one of the first steps to review. Working papers can be used to do such a process districtwide or at the building level. For example, start with No. 1 — who is out there. Basically, every school district is divided into two fundamental groups: internal and external audiences.

The internal groups are fundamental. They require effective management on a day-to-day basis. The external listing allows for a process of identifying others by groups. (The list below could be greatly expanded.) An assessment of both groups per-



As long as the school door opens and youngsters walk through it, there is a communication responsibility.

What is public relations?

Public relations is a term often used — seldom defined. In its broadest sense, public relations is "good work, publicly recognized." There is no secret formula. Public relations is simply a group itself saying: "This is who we are, what we think about ourselves, what we want to do and why we deserve your support."

mits the staff to review various groups that require interaction between the school and the community.

Internal	External
Student	Senior citizens
Parents	Retailers
Employes	Union leadership
Administration	Farm groups
School board	Civic clubs
	Professional groups, etc.

The school superintendent is charged to deliver educational services to the community as reflected by the policies of elected officials. In large or small districts, this statement is usually true: Good communication requires effective management. Most effective school managers give school-community relations a high priority and the first step is reviewing your various constituents to find out what they need to know about your schools.

Evaluate and explain your decisions

This process is one of the most important commitments a board and administration will make. The board's periodic review process should start with the district's communication policy. This examination will gauge to some extent whether or not stated goals are being achieved. There are four steps to be considered:

- **Policy review is a continuous process.** If the district does not already have a clearly stated communication policy, one should be developed.
- **The policy should be approved** through formal board action, reviewed annually and communicated to the school staff and the community.
- **It should express the purpose of the school-community relations program** and delegate to school management the necessary authority to achieve stated goals.
- **Sufficient staff and financial resources** should be allocated to carry out objectives.

After policy has been established, the board has placed in motion its planning process in terms of district goals and objectives.

Organize for communication

The "shotgun method," while effective in some instances, is not the most reliable method of communication. In most situations it does not provide a mechanicsm for two-way communication. To "hit," or communicate with, your targeted audiences at a decent percentage requires:

— Sophisticated planning.
— Realistic objectives.
— Management talent.
— Character (an honest approach by school officials is the only way — your reputation will carry you over the tough decisions).

Positive employe relations

While it is easy to state that schools belong to the people, the manner in which people are treated will go a long way in the public's perception of that ownership

Said another way, everyone who draws a paycheck from the public treasury has a responsibility to the public who pays for those services. A sign in the employe lunchroom of a department store perhaps said it all: "The public is king; the public makes paydays."

Another approach for schools might be this statement found in the central office and visitor's area of a Midwestern school district:

Work with the public like it was your best customer. **Schools and employes** must refrain from behaving, or appear-

ing to behave, as a closed monopoly. They should respond as though they were a competing agency which might lose its customers if it fails to provide prompt, courteous and effective service.

The bottom line, perhaps, is that simple acts of kindness and courtesy will go a long way among school employes and with the citizens they serve.

Provide feedback

"Feedback" is a process, in simple terms, that provides two-way communication.

Every effective major corporation in the free enterprise system uses it, especially among its employes and customers. It is so very important among organizations and product-oriented businesses because "feedback" allows management a method to see if the message is getting through to the proper audience and it ensures, to some degree, a proper course of action.

There are many low cost ways of surveying the various audiences in a school system. A telephone survey, using volunteers, is one way. Another is a written instrument utilizing trained opinion poll experts. Many school districts have used both methods.

Revise and revitalize

A philosopher once said: "What we learn from early success is simply to repeat the formula." Thus, he concluded, "all fundamental improvement comes from early failure."

Another earthy soothsayer said, "If it don't need fixin', don't fix it."

These suggestions are not intended to promote change for change's sake. They are simply reminders that on the road to "revising" school programs, and "revitalizing" our methods of operations and dealing with people, we may need to "take a chance."

School boards, administrators and other school employes should have the operating leeway to take risks. Surely educational leaders today plan, organize and execute their management structure in such a manner that we reduce the chances for failure and succeed in minimizing the risks.

Communication programs for public schools are not a frill. Honest, straightforward dialogue between elected officials and

Tips for writing communication policy

For simplicity's sake, an effective communication program can be considered to have four basic elements. All four must be taken into account if a communication program is to be effective:

- A policy commitment.
- A provision for internal (school) communication.
- A component for external (community) communication.
- A commitment of funds.

A policy commitment is the basis for effective communication. You need to communicate in two directions — within the schools and with your constituents in the community at large.

While policies differ from district to district, a policy statement on school community and public relations might include:

- The board's concern for an ongoing, open, two-way communication program.
- The areas with which the program will deal.
- The responsibilities of school personnel.
- A specific policy on the media.
- An explanation of how board meetings are run and how citizens can participate, contribute and make suggestions.
- A statement on the individual and collective roles of board members.
- Guidelines for citizen committees and other citizen advisory groups.
- Guidelines for district publications.

Reprinted from ***Becoming a Better Board Member,*** *National School Boards Association, ©1982.*

their constituents is absolutely necessary if there is any hope of retaining or restoring public confidence in the public schools.

The planned communication vehicles described in this guidebook are not free of cost; but such expenditures, which can be supported, evaluated and measured, provide a long-term benefit for students. If they don't — as with any other part of the budget — they should be scrapped.

It is the board, through its administration, that fosters a responsive staff attitude toward the needs of students, toward parents and the general public.

Communication, commitment, consistency — three words that will help the school staff build on the thousands of success stories taking place each day in the public schools.

If we are doing a good job in the classroom, then we should express our successes every day. And the only way to do it is to make communication to the public as high a priority as the teaching, learning and management process.

Such a philosophy among the board of directors and the school staff will lay a solid foundation to make schools what they should be: **Warm, friendly, creative and productive places for children to learn.**

Contributed by ***Nick Goble****, PSBA assistant executive director.*

Communication programs for public schools are not a frill. Honest, straightforward dialogue between elected officials and their constituents is absolutely necessary if there is any hope for retaining or restoring public confidence in the public schools.

Make your school inviting

Some years ago Sydney Jourard wrote a book entitled *"Disclosing Man to Himself."* Jourard maintained that there are no intellectual, emotional, social or physical barriers that we cannot overcome if we are suitably **invited** to do so. His optimistic statement marked the beginning of a fresh approach to the educative process based on confidence, respect, strength and enthusiasm. This approach has come to be called ***invitational education.***

Invitational education is centered on four basic assumptions:

- People are able, valuable and self-directing and should be treated accordingly.
- Education should be a cooperative activity.
- People possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development.
- This potential can best be realized by environments which are specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are intentionally inviting to themselves and others, both personally and professionally.

Many people think they already know what they need to know about the inviting process. In fact, it is an extremely complex process of human interaction which occurs at four levels, involves a series of skills, requires a hierarchy of risks and applies to four basic areas of personal and professional functioning.

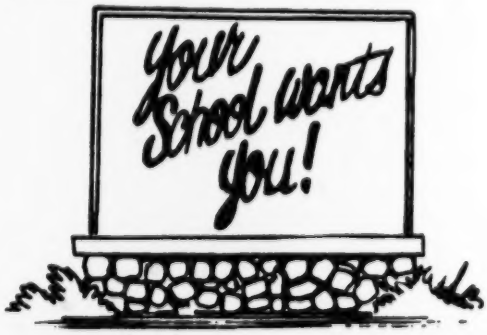
The following is a brief listing of some practical suggestions that school board members might use to help make schools more inviting: A place where people want to be and want to learn.

1. Share success: Begin each official meeting with a statement of some honest success experience that has taken place in and around schools since the last meeting. Invite educators to share accomplishments with the board. This starts each meeting on an upbeat of enthusiasm and promise.

2. Invite action: Too often, board policies give directions that could best be followed by pet rocks: **"Don't** leave a class unattended," **"No** smoking in the school," **"Cease** posting political posters in the school." Under such directions, a pet rock would make an ideal educator. Policies which invite action are much better than ones that require inaction.

3. Be explicit: The more explicit an invitation, the more it lends itself to acceptance. Sometimes school board members create misunderstandings by being vague with their policies. Others wonder "What did they mean by that?" When invitations are explicit, the likelihood of success increases.

4. Invite cooperation. Cooperation with other school systems makes good money sense. For example, if your system plans to bring in a nationally known speaker or consultant, one way to reduce



20 examples of ways school board members can invite school success.

Opportunities are everywhere, but little happens until invitations are sent, received, and acted upon.

expenses and the responsibilities involved is to ask neighboring school systems or related organizations to share the program. Everyone benefits.

5. Celebrate life: Birthdays of fellow board members, professional staff and others can be marked on a private calendar in readiness for a special greeting. Even the grouchiest person will light up when he or she receives a sincere recognition.

6. Keep a mug file: Start a card file on the people with whom you come in contact. A single index card can hold a wealth of information about individuals and their families. From time to time leaf through the file and add information. If you come across the name of someone with whom you have not talked for awhile, but should have, make a special effort to contact that individual.

7. Say "no" slowly: When a negative response to a request is necessary, at least let it come after you have listened carefully and fully to the request. One of the worst indictments that can be leveled against a board is for someone to say: "They wouldn't even listen to me!" Failure to hear a person out can hurt much more than a negative answer.

8. Be with it: Make an effort to understand the world in which professional educators live. For example, try to keep up with new technology, systems and theories by reading professional journals. There is no substitute for knowledge in making decisions.

9. Use collective pronouns: Using such pronouns as "we," "us," and "our" when referring to the school system invites a feeling of mutual support and cooperation.

10. Recharge your batteries: Handle temporary "burnout" by talking things over with a friend whom you consider to have good sense. Just talking about concerns helps to avoid accepting a lot of guilt and anxiety.

11. Relate to people, not labels: Be cautious in substituting labels for people. Sometimes labels placed on students, teachers, older adults or minority groups can be very disinviting. Focus on the individual uniqueness and value of each person.

12. Check the newspaper: Watch the newspaper for articles dealing with educators and students in the schools. Clipping an article and sharing it can be an effective way of expressing your interest, support and appreciation.

13. Look for causes: Sometimes the causes of difficulties in and around the schools are **systems** rather then **people.** For example, scheduling buses to leave school within a very few minutes after school ends each day forces students to run, shove and push to make the bus. Systems are often the cause of problems. Changing the system can eliminate the problem.

14. Send double-strength compliments: As nice as it is to receive kind words directly, it is even nicer to learn that kind words about you have been expressed to others. Rather than praising someone directly, praise that person to others, particularly to that person's supervisor. It can be highly effective for it reaches the person with double impact.

15. Be a booster: Although time is limited, make an attempt to attend school events, such as plays, interscholastic and intramural sports, concerts and other events. Buy some band candy or donate some time to the school bazaar. By demonstrating your school spirit you encourage others to do the same.

16. Rehearse the future: Often when we make a mistake, we go over it again and again in our minds, in effect practicing mistakes. A better way of handling an error is to ask: "How will I handle this problem next time?" By concentrating on future response behavior, we rehearse the future, not the past.

17. Follow through promptly: One of

the most significant characteristics of a good school board member is that he or she follows through promptly. The most positive action, when long delayed, loses much of its reward value.

18. Promote public relations: It is never a matter of whether or not the school board has public relations, it is a matter of **what kind.** To promote good public relations, make sure that messages are stated positively and clearly, particularly when comments will be printed in newspapers.

19. Cool down first: Avoid responding while angry or upset. It is important to let tempers cool down a little before taking action, particularly when something is being put in writing. It is difficult to justify disinviting behavior even if the behavior is understandable.

20. Keep things simple: When someone comes with a problem, stay on that problem. Try not to multiply the problem with counter-complaints or angry exchanges. Sometimes "second-level" problems become greater than the original ones.

These suggestions are examples of the ways school board members can help to make schools the most inviting place in town. Perhaps a good motto for board members is: "Human potential, though not always apparent, is there waiting to be discovered and invited forth."

Contributed by ***Dr. William W. Purkey,*** *professor of education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and an active writer and lecturer on the invitational education concept.*

Don't bet against polls

Too often citizens will appear at a board meeting with a petition signed by 400 or 500 people and claim it represents the thinking of the community. And too often boards have been intimidated by such a petition, thinking it's a mandate.

It could be, but I'd bet most of the time it is the thinking of a small vocal segment of the community. Of course, if it's a universal issue like lowering taxes, you can bet that's always the thinking of the entire community.

Aside from such an issue, though, I believe most petitions focus on isolated issues important only to a vested interest group.

The obvious question, then, is "How is a board to know if the petition represents the thinking of the entire community?" One of the best ways is to conduct periodic polls and have the ongoing thinking of your community on timely issues. Having this solid data base will help in decision making and in answering critics.

How accurate are the polls? If they're conducted properly, don't bet against them.

After the next presidential election, compare the findings of each candidate's pollsters over the course of the campaign. You'll find that they'll be very close.

A school district can also get results that are close to the thinking of the entire community if it follows a few rules of sampling, of wording, and of gathering the information. And it won't cost an arm and a leg.

Drawing a sample

A sample of your citizens will represent the thinking of everybody in your school district if everybody has an **equal** chance of being selected.

Before explaining how to give everybody an equal chance, I need to explain how the size of the sample is chosen. Normally, **it's not determined by the size of the population** you're surveying. I'm often asked, "What percentage of the population do I have to sample to have valid results?" This is not a relevant question. The ratio between the sample size and the population size usually is not a factor in determining valid results. Instead, **how** the respondents are selected is the important factor.

Two considerations determine the size of the sample: how much of an error can be tolerated and how much money will the survey cost. A properly selected sample of 400 citizens will give valid results within 5%. This is true if the population is 4,000 or 40,000 or 100,000 or 230 million.

How then is a representative sample selected? Use a list of names. The local telephone book is good. It won't have the unlisted numbers, but it will have most of

Periodic polls give a solid data base of the public's thinking, which will help in decision making and in answering critics.

the numbers in the community. Estimate how many phone numbers are in the book by counting the numbers on four or five pages to get an average number on a page. Multiply that by the number of white pages to get your estimate.

Divide that number by your sample size. (If you choose a 400 sample, you'll have only a 5% error.) This gives you an interval. Let's say it's 10. Pick a starting number from one to 10. This has to be done if your results are to be valid. Take 10 index cards, putting a number on each from one through 10. Shuffle them and pick a card. Let's say it was eight. Go into the phone book to the first white page and count down to the eighth phone number. That's your first respondent. Pick every 10th name (your interval) after that throughout the book. Interview those folks, and you'll have the thinking of your community.

After conducting a large survey, choose 50 citizens each month this way and interview them. You'll find out if the thinking is changing in your school district.

Phrasing the questions

Important, too, to the validity of your survey is the wording of the questions. Your sample may represent the school district, but the way questions are phrased can ruin the results.

Suggestions for wording questions found in most of the survey research books would be:

- **Avoid jargon.** In education as in other fields we have our own language from "homogeneous" to "affective learning." These can be foreign words to noneducators.
- **Be as concise as possible.** Long complex sentences opening with a conditional clause that begins with "if" can confuse respondents.
- **Structure questions to provide**

Surveying the community can be done inexpensively

Finding out what people want to know or getting the pulse of the community before major decisions is the best guarantee that communications will be on target. And it doesn't cost you an arm and a leg of taxpayers' money.

• **How many people should you survey?** If you want to assess what the community's thinking, you can come within 5% if you have a sample of 384 people. Properly selected, they will represent the thinking of the community. The key is choosing the sample in a truly random fashion so that all have the same chance to be selected. You can come within 5% of what the community's thinking with a sample of 384 people, regardless of the size of the community. If you don't need to be as precise as plus or minus 5%, you can poll fewer people.

• **Is it good public relations to send a questionnaire to every home?** It's certainly excellent PR; however, the problem is that not enough people return a questionnaire. A return of 10-25% often fails to provide enough data for you to draw any conclusions that can be defined. Be sure you use another sampling technique to ensure that data collected will be usable and defendable.

• **Should you use volunteers?** Volunteers can be a major plus for a school poll. Using volunteers keeps the cost down and gives people another opportunity to be involved in the schools. It is imperative, however, that volunteers be given specific training in proper surveying techniques.

• **What kind of questions should you ask?** Keep your questions simple and free of educational jargon so that they can be easily understood. Pre-test your questions on a small number of the community before giving them to the larger audience. The fewer the number of questions asked, the better. Certainly no more than 20. Be sure that each question is limited to just one question.

• **Where can you get help with school surveying information?** Use an outside consultant or community expert. This will often overcome criticism that the survey wasn't done professionally. The National School Public Relations Association has a booklet, How to Conduct Low-Cost Surveys, written for nonexperts. It offers step-by-step directions on all phases of the survey. (NSPRA, 1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209.)

usable results. Respondents can give many answers to this question: "How long have you lived in this school district?" Here are some answers: "A long time." "Not too long." and "We moved here when our oldest son was in eighth grade." In such a question, structure the answers this way: "Less than one year; one to five years; six to 10 years; over 10 years."

- **Avoid leading questions.** They direct respondents to the answer you'd like. Here's one I saw in a mail questionnaire: "Aren't you against this unconstitutional effort to control guns in the United States?" Or a youngster selling magazines for a school fund drive will ask, "You don't want to buy a magazine, do you?" Here the student is inadvertently leading the prospective buyer to say "no."
- **Avoid double-barreled questions.** The words "or" or "and" in a question often indicate that you could have a two-part question. Here's one: "Do you work full or part time? Yes _____ No _____." How do you answer it if you work full time and not part time?
- **Avoid ambiguous words and questions.** "Year-round" is an ambiguous word. It could have at least three meanings. "Back to basics" means different things to different people. If you're going to use them, perhaps you should define them somewhere in your survey. You can't use the results from this ambiguous question: "Don't you think writing should be emphasized in high school?" Aside from the question being biased, what does a "yes" answer mean? "Yes, I don't think . . . ." or "Yes, I do think . . . ."
- **Pre-test all questions.** Try them on folks not in your sample but similar to the ones to be interviewed.

Interviewing

With the sample drawn and the questions written, you need to recruit and train interviewers. Tap the school volunteers for

Conduct periodic polls and have the ongoing thinking of your community on timely issues.

interviewing. Senior citizens and young mothers with children at home with them can be good interviewers.

A short training session will make them familiar with the questionnaire and sampling procedures. They should be told that they must be neutral during the interview, follow the wording exactly without any judgmental comments for the respondent, and be friendly while showing a genuine interest in the respondent.

Getting the results

The three most common methods of getting the information from respondents are: personal interview, telephone interview and mail questionnaire.

A very popular method is the telephone interview. It's inexpensive and can be completed in a short period of time.

The personal interview is probably the best method, but it's costly and takes a great amount of time. Besides, guarded-access apartments pose problems to interviewers.

The worst method for valid results is the mail questionnaire. Avoid it. I've yet to see a valid sample returned from a mail questionnaire. The response rate is extremely low.

Designing the questionnaire

Too often schools want to ask too much in a survey. Any number of questions over 25 will tend to frustrate a respondent. Usually, questionnaires have three sec-

tions: Introduction, Main Section, and Concluding Section.

In the **Introduction** give the purpose of the survey, the sponsor of it and eligibility questions or statements such as: "I'd like to interview anyone over 18 years of age" or "Do you live in Wilmore School District?" This latter question is used in areas where phone exchanges straddle two districts.

The **Main Section** would contain the opinion questions or some behavioral questions such as "How often have you visited a school in the last year?" This section contains the bulk of the survey questions.

The **Concluding Section** would include the demographic questions in sequence from the least to the most threatening. Naturally, end this section and the interview with a note of thanks.

Announcing the survey

For better cooperation by the citizens, it's wise to make an announcement in the local media that a survey will be conducted.

Once the results are tabulated, you should release them to the public. You'll be surprised how positive the results usually are. One way of losing credibility with the public is to not release the results of a survey. Citizens will think you're hiding something.

Contributed by ***Donald R. Gallagher,*** *professor of communications at Glassboro (NJ) State College.*

Survey methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Personal Interview	1. Higher percent of return 2. More detailed information 3. Information apt to be more correct 4. Misunderstandings can be cleared up by more in-depth explanation 5. Use of visuals possible 6. Personal contact	1. Personal and transportation costs 2. Possibility interviewer can bias response or record answer incorrectly 3. Strict supervision of data collection required 4. Time consuming 5. Training of interviewers required 6. Lack of standard approach by interviewers 7. Volunteers needed
Telephone Interview	1. Inexpensive and fast 2. Minimal training required 3. Wide reach in short time 4. Easier to call back if respondent is busy 5. Small response bias because of fixed-response questions	1. Limited to listed phone numbers 2. Easy for respondent to hang up 3. Difficult to get detailed or attitudinal information 4. Volunteers needed
Mailed Questionnaires	1. Wide distribution at low cost-per-completed-interview 2. Can reach more remote areas 3. Respondents may be more honest and inclined to answer in privacy of home 4. Shorter time in getting all surveys to respondents 5. Fewer volunteers needed	1. Time-consuming; more preparation required 2. Lower number of returns 3. Possibility returns may not be representative of entire group 4. Inability to clarify questions 5. Possibility one person or group could collect many questionnaires and answers, thereby "stacking" results 6. Need to send reminders

Contributed by ***Paul Rhetts,*** *president of Laser Publishing and Design and former public information officer of the Howard County (MD) Public Schools. Excerpted from* ***Finding Out How People Feel About Local Schools,*** *a parents' network publication of The National Committee for Citizens in Education, ©1984.*

Helpful guidelines for advisory committees

The school board will frequently want to form advisory committees to study or make recommendations on various projects or issues before the school district or community. Such committees can be made up of students, school staff or citizens at large.

Some basic guidelines ensure smoother committee operation and success. First, recognize that advisory committees are just that — advisory. They are a means of involving other people. It is hoped that their input will lead to more informed decisions and judgments by the school board. Advisory committees are not designed to "run" the schools. That responsibility must necessarily rest with the school board who is lawfully and practically charged with such a role.

Advisory committees, especially those dealing with school personnel, should not be confused with bargaining agreement relationships between the board and its employes. These kinds of relationships are governed and reviewed by a completely different mechanism. Teachers and other employes should be included in the makeup of certain advisory groups — not necessarily as representatives of employe organizations, but because their background will be helpful to the mission of the committee.

Here are tips regarding positive aspects of committees, cautions and questions to ask before starting an advisory committee.

Positive and negative aspects

- With proper advance planning, citizens' committees can be of immeasurable value to a school district and the community in general.
- Establishment of a committee can force or crystalize the recognition of a problem facing the system.
- Citizens can be involved in a profitable manner.
- Citizens will gain information about the school system and education in general through committee study.
- New lines of thought will occur as committee members (and school personnel) dig into the study area.
- Ideas and suggestions will be provided to the board of directors.
- Committee members will carry ideas and attitudes to other people in the community.
- Final reports and recommendations

Here's a way to involve students, school staff or citizens to provide input which will lead to more informed board decisions.

Basic guidelines

- State clearly and precisely the goals of the advisory committee.
- Involve a representative cross-section of the community and the school family.
- Keep advisory committee membership at a manageable level.
- Establish a time schedule and specific goals.
- Determine precisely how the committee will work with the news media.
- Don't have too many advisory committees in operation at one time.
- Staff the advisory committee properly in terms of administration and other support personnel.
- Establish a clear understanding as to what will happen with the committee's report and deliberations.
- Keep the committee on its course.
- Discharge and thank the committee in a meaningful and appropriate manner.

of the committee to the board may reinforce existing board opinion. The board may then feel confident to act.

Cautions

- If a committee is not needed for a particular problem, necessary action may be delayed by the formation of a committee.
- If the final report is shelved with no immediate action, committee members will view their work as worthless and their time as wasted.
- If the committee oversteps its charge or assignment, the problem is not studied properly and the value of the final report is of little value.
- If the committee membership is not representative of the community to the degree necessary, recommendations will arise out of an unrepresentative pressure group and taint the final report.
- If the committee is appointed at the wrong time of the year or with too long or too much time for the study period, the interest of committee members wanes.
- If the ground rules for communication (between the committee and board, news media and general public) are not drawn properly at the outset, confusion sets in as to what is to be said to whom.
- If the committee conducts little substantial research, the final report is a collection of generalizations and opinions of little value to anyone.
- If the advisory committee members assume that all recommendations will be acted upon immediately, prudent reaction by the board may be taken as refusal to act by committee members.

Questions you should ask

There are a number of questions that should be asked, either by members of the board or by school administrators, before final arrangements are made for an advisory committee. Experience with successful committees suggests that the answers to these questions are needed before organizing:

- What is the problem? Is it defined well enough for a committee to dig into it?
- Is it the kind of problem a citizens' committee can deal with or are there better ways of resolving the situation?
- What is the charge to be given to the committee? What is it expected to do? Are there limitations imposed on the committee?
- Who should be on the committee? How are members to be selected? What qualifications should they have? Will membership be representative of the community?
- How large should the committee be? Will there be enough to conduct business and yet not too many?
- How long does the committee have in which to conduct the study? Is it sufficient to do a good job?

- Is the committee charged with making a report? To whom? Will the report be made public? If not, why not?
- If it is a continuing council or committee, how will the membership be rotated?
- What provision has the board or administration made for continuing communication with the committee?
- What resources are available to assist the committee in its study?
- What funds will be needed to conduct committee business — for example, printing, paper, postage, travel — and who is to provide these funds?

10 commandments for effective building-level committees

Need a little help to develop cohesiveness and purposefulness in an advisory committee or some other group you're working with? Here are a few practical procedures that can help to develop good working relationships at the building level.

1. Press for a Broadly Representative Committee: Its impact and credibility will be increased, whether it is advisory or decision-making. This means, in plain language, representative by ethnic groups, by sex and by socio-economic status.

2. Environment: Provide for comfort (preferably chairs around tables — we all need something to lean on) and eye contact (chairs arranged in a circle, a square or U-shaped). Have coffee available — it's just common hospitality. If you charge, you will generally get better results with a polite sign that suggests "Thank you for your donation" than with a flat fee.

3. Identification: Use nametags with both the person and the school or organization he or she represents identified on the tag in big, clear letters — starting with the first meeting. Have round-the-room introductions and take attendance; you may need to know who was there when a motion was passed or decision made.

4. Provide each Member of the group with a packet of carefully selected information (too much, and nobody will ever read it; too little, and you may leave too many questions unanswered). It should include:

- A membership list of the entire group, as soon as the membership is established, with addresses and phone numbers, so members can communicate readily with each other.
- Briefly stated, the purpose of the committee, if it is new or a brief-duration ad hoc committee; or a brief history of the group, if it is an established and continuing committee; bylaws, if there are any in effect.
- Other pertinent date, such as maps, briefly and clearly stated relevant statistics, or lists. You can't expect people to operate in a vacuum; on the other hand, don't deluge them with more material than the minimum essentials — especially, until they ask for it.

5. Encourage Members to "Look after one Another", through car pools; and calling one another when a member has been absent after the first meeting.

6. Set Parameters Clearly and Honestly, and don't delude people with a false expectation of authority they may not have. If the committee is advisory, make it clear for whom the advice is intended; and make sure that recommendations are communicated.

7. Support It! If the committee is worth having at all, it is worth a little clerical support. Send out brief minutes of the meetings to all members, and a combination agenda-reminder notice in advance of the next meeting.

8. Encourage Internal Leadership, and the suggesting of future agenda items by committee members. Form a small steering committee elected by the group to plan meetings, but provide back-up support.

9. Set Starting and Ending Times, and stick to them! Any meeting lasting more than two hours is of questionable value; many can be shorter. People are busy, have their own lives to live, and need to know in advance the time commitment they are making.

10. Keep your Sense of Humor! The most serious discussion has its lighter side, and a touch of humor adds perspective. Remember, the "human comedy" is just that!

- Who will provide the leadership for the committee? How will this person or these persons be selected? Do committee members know this before accepting membership on the committee?
- How will decisions be made in the committee? Should this be left up to members or is there a preferred method?
- When the committee has completed its work, what sort of acknowledgment is planned — a dinner, a letter, a certificate?
- Who is going to provide an evaluation of the committee? Information should be gathered indicating why the committee succeeded or failed in certain areas so that changes in structure and operation can be made for future committees.

Contributed by ***Nick Goble,*** *PSBA assistant executive director, and* ***Albert E. Holliday,*** *director of the Educational Communication Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the Journal of Educational Public Relations.*

Educational atmosphere-relationship study: A management-communication inventory

The purpose of this inventory is to learn the perceptions of employes about the nature of management and communication in their school system. It can also serve as a springboard for discussion at the central office or school level about the need for possible changes in management and communication practices.

Note that two responses are requested for each item. The first is whether or not that activity or process occurs. The second regards your opinion as to priority.

District-level assessment

		Yes	No	Unknown	Priority: Highest	Priority: Some	Priority: None
1.	The school system as a whole has a planned program of internal and external communication.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	One person has the responsibility to supervise the operation of the program.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	A staff newsletter for all employes is published regularly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	The school board holds public hearings on important issues and encourages participation of the citizenry.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	One segment of regular school board meetings is devoted to special reports of the staff on various aspects of the curriculum, organization, discipline, etc.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	The school board adopts short-term goals for the system each year, reviews progress 12 months later and sets new short-term goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	The school board requires the superintendent and staff to establish performance objectives, review progress and set new goals annually.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	The school board sets performance objectives, reviews progress and sets new goals for **itself** each year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	The superintendent meets with administrators and staff representatives to discuss matters of mutual concern.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Possible new policies, rules and regulations are discussed with the staff before they are acted upon.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	Staff members participate on local and systemwide advisory and study committees.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	Morale of staff members is monitored.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13.	Achievements of staff members are noted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14.	Surveys of staff members' attitudes and opinions about levels of trust, respect and cooperation are conducted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15.	Each employe meets with that person's supervisor annually to review job performance and set goals for the next year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

		Yes	No	Unknown	Priority: Highest	Priority: Some	Priority: None
16.	Members of peer groups on all levels have opportunities to meet to discuss common concerns.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17.	Information about school board actions at meetings is promptly transmitted to the staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18.	The school system supplies information about district policies and operation to regular substitute teachers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19.	Members of the staff have opportunites to make suggestions and comments about aspects of school operation to their supervisors and peers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20.	The school system issues a periodical containing news and information about people and activities in the system for the citizenry.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21.	Opinion questionnaires are administered on occasion on the school system level and individual school levels to learn opinions and thoughts of parents and citizens.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22.	The school system takes advantage of opportunities to exhibit school projects and student work at shopping malls, fairs and festivals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23.	An information center is maintained at the central office where citizens may call to obtain assistance, information, check on rumors, etc.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.	Files regarding people and resources in the community that have applicability for the enrichment of instruction are maintained at the central office and school levels for staff use.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.	A directory of community and civic leaders and organizations is maintained.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.	Lay citizens occupying key positions in the community are identified (as "key communicators") and regularly supplied with important information about schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27.	Public recognition is given to lay citizens and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28.	Special efforts and means are used to maintain constructive contacts with older citizens.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29.	The school system operates an adult education program suited to the needs and interests of the citizenry.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30.	Yearly and monthly calendar of events are issued and made available to parents and interested citizens.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31.	The school system operates an organized speakers' bureau, composed of staff members willing to speak to community groups.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32.	One person has been designated as the chief contact with the news media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
33.	News releases are issued to the media as often as circumstances warrant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Building-level assessment

34.	The school has a planned program of community and public relations suitable for its particular needs, problems and resources.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
35.	One person has the responsibility to supervise the operation of the program.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
36.	All staff members have specific responsibilities in their school's program.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

		Yes	No	Unknown	Priority Highest	Some	None
37.	A school newsletter for parents is issued at least four times a year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
38.	An orientation handbook is published annually for students and parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
39.	New residents with children are welcomed by a staff representative in person, by mail or phone.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
40.	Inservice training meetings are held at least annually for all members of the staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
41.	New employes are provided with a program of orientation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
42.	Deliberate efforts are made to develop and maintain wholesome and constructive teacher-student relations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
43.	Orientation programs are held for students who will advance to different levels the next year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
44.	Students are made aware of school rules and regulations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
45.	Students have opportunities to learn reasons for their being in school and for their specific learning activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Climate inventory assessment factors

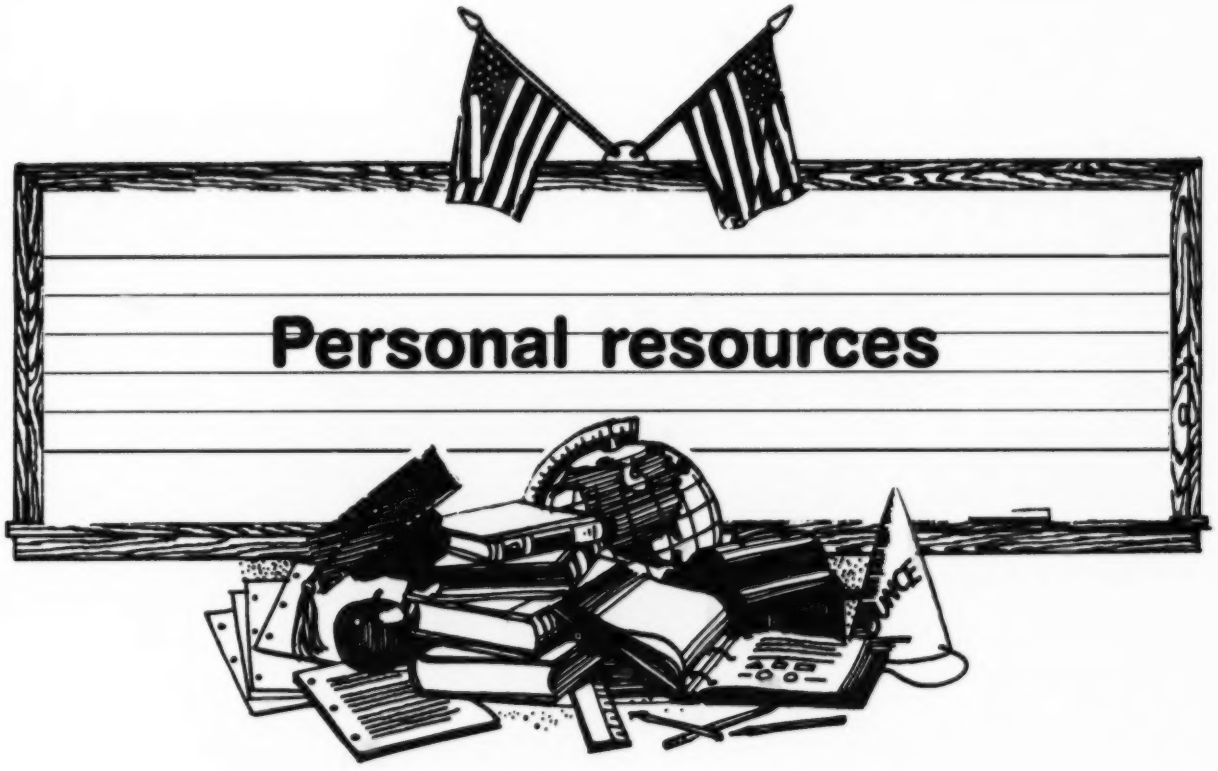
These 10 assessment factors can be used by a cross section of board members, staff, parents and others to stimulate discussion and develop a profile of the school system's overall climate of communication and collaboration.

Some of the factors may prove to be argumentative. This is fine as long as the group is able to reach a consensus as to the district's strengths, challenges, and what can and should be done according to your resources and goals.

	Yes	No
1. The school system and individual schools have planned programs (written) of internal and external communication, and one person has the responsibility to coordinate each program.	☐	☐
2. All staff members have specific responsibilities in their school's program.	☐	☐
3. Goal setting and evaluation are shared processes in the school community.	☐	☐
4. The system makes full use of commercial media and its own channels of communication to orient the citizenry about achievements of the schools and the challenges facing schools.	☐	☐
5. Each school has a variety of opportunities for parent involvement and parent-student-teacher interaction (including the high school level).	☐	☐
6. The system and schools recognize the achievements of students, staff and citizens in a variety of ways.	☐	☐
7. Nonparents have opportunities to learn about schools, participate in activities and receive services.	☐	☐
8. Major employers of the school's graduates in the area have opportunities for feedback, suggestions and comments.	☐	☐
9. Staff members participate in a cross section of community organizations and activities.	☐	☐
10. The school-community communication program is evaluated annually.	☐	☐

		Yes	No	Unknown	Priority Highest	Some	None
46.	Students are provided instruction in the history, problems and programs of education, especially at the local level.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
47.	Student evaluations of school programs are solicited in an organized manner and these evaluations are used as the basis for constructive action.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
48.	Students are invited to serve as members of advisory and study committees appointed by the school board, superintendent or principals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
49.	Morale of students is monitored and reasons for high or low morale identified.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
50.	Teachers have personal contacts with parents of their students frequently during the school year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
51.	Advisory committees of parents, citizens and staff are appointed on occasion to study issues and problems of local concern.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
52.	The school provides a variety of opportunities for parent involvement, collaboration and interaction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
53.	Parent-teacher conferences are carefully planned and scheduled so that student progress and achievement can be reported and discussed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
54.	Parents are encouraged to make visits to the school for special events.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
55.	Citizens (nonparents) are invited to attend special events at the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
56.	The school has an active parent-teacher group which meets frequently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
57.	Parents and citizens are invited to serve as aides, assistants, advisers and resource people in schools or at school-sponsored events.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
58.	Each school unit has at least one open house or school night program so parents and citizens may become acquainted with school personnel, programs and facilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
59.	Administrators and teachers plan and implement informal activities and meetings with parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
60.	The communication program is evaluated every year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Contributed by **Albert E. Holliday,** executive director of the Educational Communication Center, Camp Hill, PA.
Copyright 1986.



Personal resources

175 How to write so you'll be understood

179 Four steps to success in public speaking

181 Self-help suggestions for public speaking

How to write so you'll be understood

Much poor writing stems from the failure to recognize that good writing is essentially "talking on paper." And it's made worse by the belief that big words and long sentences make one appear more dignified and more professional.

The written word will always remain a vital form of communication between the schools and the public. School directors must write numerous reports and statements for public consumption. Unfortunately, much of the writing is foggy, jargon-laden, wordy, dull and too complex for the average reader. It tends to be loaded with weak verbs, abstract terms, involved sentences, vague phrasing and boring instructions.

School officials must learn to write so readers can grasp the message quickly. Most readers tire easily and won't work to dig out the message. The techniques suggested here will help transform a murky communication into a readable one.

Know your audience

All communications must be related to the specific characteristics, needs and interests of the audience. It is essential to know their educational levels and occupations; their beliefs and attitudes; their group loyalties and norms; and whether they are friendly, hostile or indifferent. You should never send a message unless it's tailored to fit the audience. Asking yourself the following questions before writing will help:

- How much does my audience know?
- What might they want to know?
- What should they know?
- How can I present it to them in an interesting way?

Research shows the average person reads either to escape boredom or to be rewarded. So — to get maximum impact — your message must provide a benefit for readers on their terms. And the benefit must be indicated to them immediately, or they'll lose interest.

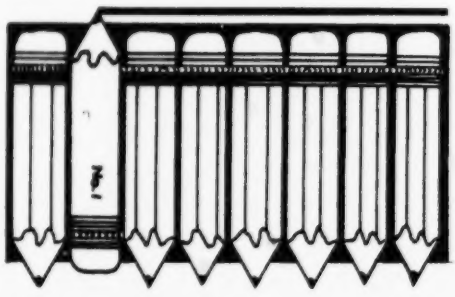
Get to the point right away; long introductions bore readers. Research shows that readers will often stay with you for a 500-word message if you can interest them to read beyond the first 50 words. Conversely, most readers stop reading before 50 words — unless they identify the subject with their own interests.

Learn to write so readers can grasp the message quickly.

Avoid jargon

Every profession has its jargon or specialized language, and education is no exception. When used among educators, jargon sometimes speeds up communication. When aimed at lay citizens, it merely confounds and befuddles them.

Suppose a physician were to tell you "the retraction of dendrites produces a break in the synaptic connections." Or suppose a printer were to mention that "a ligature will prevent damage to the kerns." Confused? Then why expect lay citizens to



Some writers use long, pompous words in the mistaken belief that such words add dignity and strength to their message. More often, they make writers appear stuffy and unapproachable.

be less confused with terms such as "distributive education," "paraprofessional," "articulation," "multimedia" and "resource person?" If you must use specialized terms, either put them in a context that indicates their meaning, or explain them as they are introduced. For example: "Resource centers — formerly known as libraries — now contain globes, films, records and charts in addition to books and magazines." Also, avoid those jargon-laden cliches that smack of gobbledygook — writing that suffers from a swelling of its parts.

Use familiar words

Always use words you're sure an audience will understand. There's no point in obscuring a message with long words that send a reader to the dictionary or to the evening newspaper for relief. The tendency to be pompous and to display one's vocabulary must be resisted. Short and easy-to-understand words — those with Anglo-Saxon roots — communicate effectively with most audiences.

Always use words you're sure an audience will understand. Short and easy-to-understand words will communicate effectively with most audiences.

Winston Churchill, facing Hitler's armed forces in 1940, said to Americans: "Give us the tools, and we will do the job." He did not say, "Supply us with the necessary inputs of relevant equipment, and we will implement the program and accomplish its objectives." Churchill's vigorous language helped to lift his nation to victory in the face of defeat.

Some writers use long, pompous words in the mistaken belief that such words add dignity and strength to their messages. More often, they make the writer appear stuffy and unapproachable. Even worse, they force the reader to struggle too hard to get the message. Where possible, substitute words such as "try" for "endeavor," "total" for "aggregate," "end" for "terminate," and "best" for "optimum."

Use concrete terms

Fowler, in "The King's English," urges writers to "be direct, simple, brief, vigorous and lucid." He also tells them to prefer the concrete word to the abstract. This is good advice because readers — even educated ones — prefer terms they can picture. Abstract words and phrases often confuse readers or mislead them into believing that they understand what the writer means. They also leave the door open to interpretations the writer never anticipated.

The advice to use concrete terms in no way implies that abstractions or generalizations should always be avoided. They are often necessary when introducing an idea or a concept. But they should be followed — when possible — with specific, concrete examples or descriptions to ensure clarity.

Apply readability formulas

Readability formulas have been devised that rate writing on a scale ranging from very-easy-to-read to very-difficult-to-read. One of these — the Gunning-Meuller Fog Index — reduces everything to a number that approximates the grade level at which a person must read to comprehend the material. For example, writing with a Fog Index of 10 is aimed at those who read at or above the tenth grade level.

To determine the Fog Index, take a 100 word sample of something you've written and apply these steps:

1. Find the average number of words per sentence in the sample. (If the final sentence in the sample runs beyond the 100th word, use more than 100 words to compute the average for this step.)

2. Count the number of words in the 100 word sample containing three syllables or more. (Do not count proper nouns or three-syllable verb forms ending in -ed or -es.)

3. Add the average number of words per sentence to the number of words containing three or more syllables and multiply the sum by 0.4.

For example: A 100 word passage contains an average of 20 words per sentence and 10 words of three or more syllables. The sum of these two factors is 30 (20 plus 10). Multiplying 30 by 0.4 gives a Fog Index of 12.

How to achieve readability

Several formulas exist to measure readability — the degree of simplicity that makes writing easy to read and meaning easy to grasp. Essentially, they focus on two criteria: sentence length and word length.

• Long sentences, as a rule, require more reader effort than shorter ones, because the longer the sentence, the more ideas it contains. As a result, readers have to work harder to grasp the meaning contained in the sentence and to associate the ideas with what has gone on before. If you find a sentence becoming too long, break it up into two or more sentences.

• Long words — those that contain more than two syllables as a rule — give readers the most trouble. When we add prefixes and suffixes to a root word, we make it more abstract and more difficult to comprehend. You don't have to eliminate all multisyllable words to achieve readability. They are often needed to convey meaning. But, you should guard against piling them up one after another.

If you don't like formulas, try one of these three techniques to help assure a low readability score.

- Aim for passages that average 150 syllables per 100 words and sentences that average 17 words.
- Try to restrict 60-70% of your words to five letters or fewer. Or, try an average of five letters per word. An indepth analysis of major newspapers showed that their stories averaged 5.07 letters per word.
- Allow no more than two ideas per sentence, preferably one idea. Make 60-70% of your sentences simple ones, those containing just a subject and predicate with no additional clauses. The indepth study of newspapers cited above disclosed that 67% of their sentences were simple ones.

Excerpted from ***communication briefings*** *by* ***Frank Grazian,*** *executive editor.*

In applying the formula, take note of these findings:

- The average American reads at the ninth grade level. However, many read below that level.
- Most readers feel more comfortable reading at one or two levels below their maximum.

The index has been applied to the writing in many school publications, and too often the level is too high for the audience. How, for example, does an urban school district expect to communicate with parents of ghetto children when it sends out a newsletter aimed at the 12th grade level?

Watch sentence structure

Educators and other professionals tend to qualify too much when writing. This stems from the desire to make the communication as clear as possible. However, qualifications often result in torturous sentences that have the opposite effect — especially when writing for lay citizens. The cure: Check every qualification to see if it's necessary for the audience. Omit unnecessary ones and place the required ones into separate sentences where possible.

Placing the verb early in the sentence also will help simplify sentence structure. Holding it to the end keeps the reader wondering about — and sometimes losing — the main point.

Another suggestion to simplify sentence structure: Where possible, place the main clause first when using complex sentences. This will give the reader a frame of reference to apply when reaching the subordinate clause, which qualifies or modifies the main clause.

Additional writing tips

Here are additional techniques to help your writing communicate:

• Avoid useless words that contribute nothing to meaning. They delay the message and fatigue the reader. Don't write:

"It is our opinion that at the present time 80% of our high school students are in a financial position to attend college." Instead, write: "We believe that 80% of our high school students now can afford to attend college." Saving: eight words.

• Use strong verbs and the active voice where you can. Strong verbs impart vigor to sentences, and the active voice adds to clarity and movement. Also, substitute verbs that depict motion for parts of the inactive verb "to be" (is, are, and so forth) — especially when those verbs function as main verbs in a sentence.

• Don't overtax verbs with too many nouns and adjectives. An example: "The continuous progress concept of education with its emphasis on individualized instruction *has generated* wider usage of audiovisual services in our schools." That single verb simply cannot support the load. Additional verbs or verb forms must be introduced by changing some of the phrases into clauses or by breaking the sentence up into two sentences. Merely adding one more verb will help improve the example somewhat — even though the sentence is still loaded with jargon and abstractions: "The continuous progress concept of education, which *emphasizes* individualized instruction, *has generated* wider usage of audiovisual services in our schools." As a rule, strive to inject one active verb for every 10 words.

Excerpted from ***School Communications: Ideas That Work*** *by* ***Don Bagin, Frank Grazian*** *and* ***Charles H. Harrison,*** *© 1972.*

Important letterwriting guidelines to communicate with your state legislator

1. On the envelope use "The Honorable" and in the greeting of the letter use "Dear Senator" or "Dear Representative."

2. Identify yourself as a registered voter in his district by giving your full name and address. State clearly that you are a school board member.

3. If possible, identify the bill in which you are interested by number and printer's number and give a short description of its provisions.

4. Give the reasons for the position you are taking. Be specific and let the legislator know how the measure will affect his own district.

5. One typewritten page is usually sufficient.

6. Limit your letter to one subject.

7. Send your letter when the bill is being considered in committee or on the floor.

8. Neither threats nor insincere flattery will win cooperation.

9. Ask specifically for support or opposition.

10. Use school board or district stationery, if possible. Do not use form letters or printed postcards.

11. Urge your constituency to contact the legislators as a supplement to the action taken by the local board.

Four steps to success in public speaking

In the late 1970s, America saw the development of a back-to-basics movement. Its supporters called for a focus on "reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic." Unfortunately, a fourth R — rhetoric — in its classic sense — has never been part of the educational foundation. While young citizens certainly need to learn how to read, write and calculate, they have as great a need to learn how to communicate orally. But for the past 20 or 30 years, educators have not stressed oral communication skills in the classroom, and even college graduates enter the marketplace without the ability to make an engaging and worthwhile presentation before an audience.

The legacy has been a majority of adults who do not relish an assignment to speak before an audience. The authors of *The People's Almanac* report that speaking before an audience is the greatest fear of most people.

Public speaking, however, does not need to be a traumatic event in anyone's life, especially if the four steps to speaking success are known.

1 Begin with a smile

An audience likes nothing more than to be greeted by an enthusiastic, confident presenter. This implies to the audience that the speaker is well prepared, enjoys the experience and has something worthwhile to say.

As you prepare to speak, plan to build upon the audience's goodwill. Return their warmth via a confident manner — justified by knowledge and good preparation — and your relationship with your listeners will begin on an upbeat note.

2 Organize your presentation carefully

Excellent speakers structure their speeches so that listeners will have good recall of their main points a month or two later.

Several ways in which this might be accomplished are:

• **By presenting a strong, clear, to-the-point opening that sets forth the main idea of the speech.** This is done right after the speaker acknowledges the introduction by the master of ceremonies. The opening sets the tone for your presentation and alerts the audience regarding the direction in which you are headed. Don't chit-chat, tell jokes, or apologize because you didn't have enough time to plan. Go right to the point.

• **Clearly delineate the three or four sections or areas of the body for your speech** (even to the extent of labeling them 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C). What you are seeking is to "stick" the essentials of your message in a listener's mind.

Clear delineation of the body of the speech is required for a persuasive or stimulating speech, as well as for the general information speech. But keep the section to three or four, which is about all that can adequately be covered in the time usually available.

• **Call for definite action on the part of listeners in your conclusion.** Give concrete suggestions — what they can or should do to support your ideas or point of view, or to learn more about the subject.

3 Illustrate your speech graphically

The best abstract principles and the

Public speaking doesn't have to be traumatic.

wisest generalities will fall on unreceptive ears unless you illustrate them in terms and references the audience can comprehend.

Those people we identify as excellent speakers possess one characteristic — they have the ability to relate their ideas to ours. They do this by using a variety of examples and real-life experiences, many of which have application to **our own** lives, to explain **their** theories. They paint mental pictures for us and by so doing, give us the human dimension, leading us to think, "He sure hit that nail on the head."

This can be done by telling anecdotes, referring to real-life situations (not jokes), the use of quotes, testimony and figures of speech. These references give the audience an insight into the theory (or statement of fact) by showing how it operates or how it can be put to use or its application in reality. In some cases, natural humor is appropriate; in others, use statistics, quotes of people, references to books or authorities or true life situations.

4 Be as brief as you can be

The greatest fault of most novice speakers is trying to cover too much territory in the time allotted. The only way to be sure that what you've prepared will fill the assigned 20-minute period and not 40 or 50 minutes is to have a rehearsal. Present the speech before a friend or into a tape recorder, and time it. Then, cut back as necessary to keep to the allotted time.

Most people can easily talk for about an hour on subjects they know well. But very few listeners can remain attentive to one speaker for that length of time. Question-and-answer periods after the formal presentation, however, usually allow the speaker to give more details or amplify major points in a setting with high audience attention.

There is no set ideal time or ideal length for any speech. The proper length can depend on the subject, the ability of the speaker, the composition of the audience, the setting, or other conditions, but in most cases, it is the program chairman who sets the length of the talk.

---

*Contributed by **Albert E. Holliday,** director of the Educational Communications Center (Camp Hill, PA) and editor of the Journal of Educational Public Relations.*

Handling tough audience questions

In most speaking situations relating to educational issues, a time equal to or longer than the speaker's time is reserved for questions, and sometimes comments from the audience.

Allowing a question period is usually advisable because (1) it permits the audience to raise matters perhaps not covered by the speaker; (2) the speaker can gain a quick gauge of how well the speech was received; and (3) questions will allow the speaker to amplify or clarify a point not adequately covered in the formal presentation.

The same advice for preparing the main speech applies to handling questions, even the tough ones: Get right to the point, and be brief. Try to respond to the heart of the question and respond to it to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer or believe it to be a "hot potato" that you should not or cannot address at that time, say so clearly. Audiences usually have an uncanny ability to see through a speaker who attempts to fake a response or tries to avoid an issue without being obvious. The best course is the honest one. People will forgive you for not having all the answers or referring a policy type of question to a higher authority (such as the school board or the superintendent), but they will not accept a speaker who misleads them, regardless of motives.

On occasion, you may face hostile questions from people who disagree with your views and who will use that gathering to throw you a loaded question. Unless you are participating in a formal debate (which can be an otherwise excellent means to air an important issue), resist the urge to argue. You can correct any incorrect facts presented by a person raising a question but restrict your comments to a restatement of your main point or add a few more details in justification. If a speaker misuses the question period to make a minispeech, defer to the master of ceremonies or presiding officer to bring the meeting back to order.

Even if a questioner is clearly off-base and unfair, the audience makes the final judgment. If you have done your homework and prepared your message according to the needs and interests of the audience, you really don't have to worry about hostile questions and comments.

Self-help suggestions for public speaking

Of all the potential terrors human beings face, speaking in public is the number one fear.

We all need to be trained to use our minds, faces, bodies and voices so the audiences seeing us for the first time will like and believe us. We must train to cope with confrontation.

• **Use your mind to share information, but pause before you speak.** That is the key. To use the tool of your mind to best advantage, remember to remain silent during the pause; maintain eye contact, but don't look frightened or intimidated; don't dignify accusations, rather give them a completely positive answer, something you can say with pride; and give real examples. Don't ever refuse to talk to a reporter; don't give him a chance to say you wouldn't respond.

• **A genuine and appropriate smile opens the face and creates warmth and credibility.** A smile can be a put-down with affection.

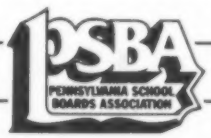
• **Gestures and body language must always be genuine and appropriate.** When standing, have your hands hanging comfortably at your sides without moving your fingers. Our faces and hands are the "naked" parts of our bodies and we tend to put them away in stressful situations such as interviews with the media. These actions cause self-orientation rather than audience-orientation. You must remember who your audience is when you are being interviewed.

• **The voice is warmest and most believable when the face is open. Concentrate on volume, pitch and rate.** Your volume should be conversational level, not speech level, without preaching, teaching or orating. Talk quietly. Keep the energy in your voice. Nothing is more deadly or destructive to your image than a quiet, closed sound.

• **Proper breathing from the diaphragm is the fifth weapon for good public speaking.** When people fall apart it becomes a stressful situation. The muscles of the neck and head tighten and you show that you're intimidated as your voice rises. Breathing should be healthy, natural, from the diaphragm where it belongs. With controlled breathing, all the other stresses that make public speaking unbearable are diminished. When you breathe properly, your body feels comfortable.

Excerpted from a presentation by ***Arch Lustberg,*** *professional communicator, at the 1985 PSBA State Conference. A former university speech and drama professor, he teaches communication workshops for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.*

Speaking in public is the number one fear for human beings. Proper breathing from the diaphragm controls the stress and makes the body more comfortable.



Pennsylvania School Boards Association

774 Limekiln Road

New Cumberland, Pennsylvania 17070

11-87-8M